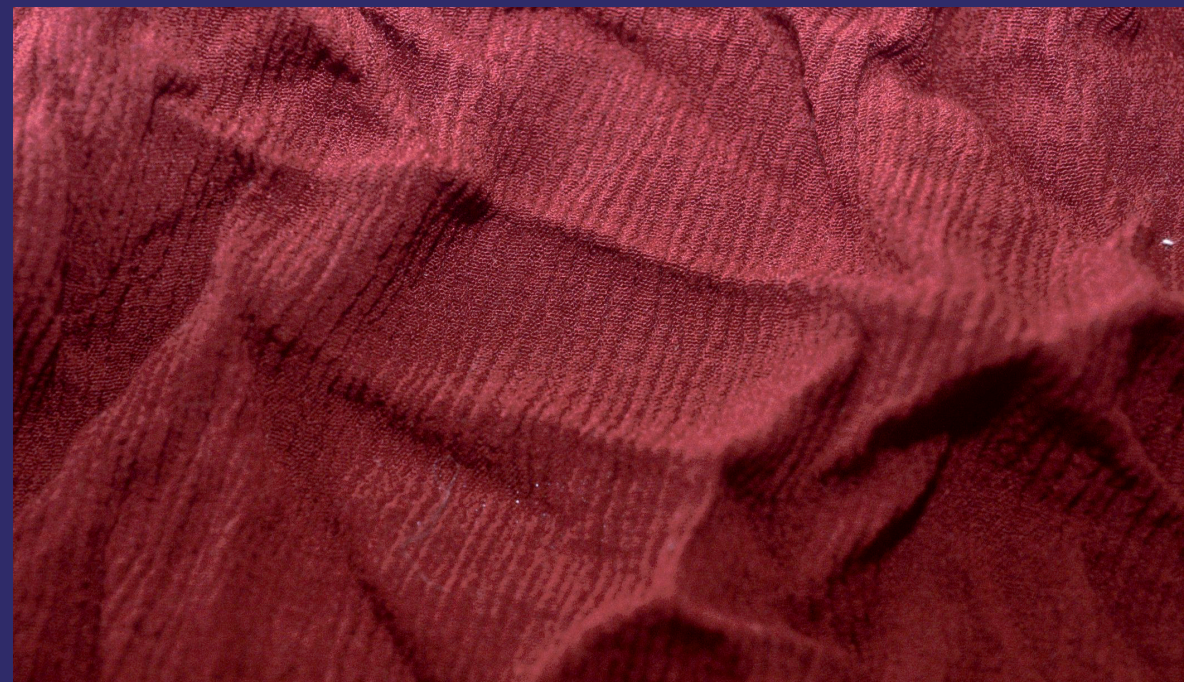


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From Ritual to Republic

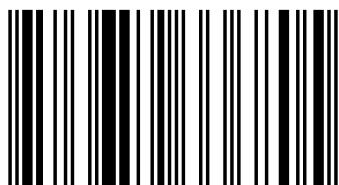


K.V. Cybil

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K.V.Cybil is a Junior Fellow at the Teenmurti Library, New Delhi. His published works include 'Haunting and the Republic: Spectrology of a Custodial Death', Journal of Polity and Society and 'Revolution : Social or Political? The Perspectives of Satyashodak Marxism and Naxalism', Indian Journal of Political Science.

From Ritual to Republic : Death as a Democratic Discourse



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FOREWORD

Dr K.V. Cybil has written an extremely important book, which foreground the debates on ideology and caste, which is so significant in the debates today on identity politics. By working on the life of Sardar Gopalakrishnan, who was a legendary political worker, (whose contribution has been documented in party histories of the Communist Party in Kerala in the 1950s, and then contributed to legendary and local histories, as well as plays and fictionalized narratives,) Dr Cybil draws our attention to the interlocking of methodologies between oral historians and sociologists. The book is concerned with how we look at Congress and Marxist politics in the crucial years of nation building, and the ways in which this history would be interlaced with the lives of men and women who had strong feelings about the text and contexts of democracy and constitutional rights to the freedom of speech and the right to protest.

Interestingly, the body of Sardar becomes the marker for the debate around the subject of State and political freedoms. The historiography of village and nation are meshed in this sociological reading of individual, family, caste, village and political party. The story told by Dr Cybil is both readable and erudite, regarding the nature of cultic elements in politics. It has been written with a meticulous eye for detail, which allows us to understand rural life, national politics, as well as correspondences between state and institutions, such as political parties and the police in Kerala. It uses narratives as the main frame within which we can discuss our own orientations to primordial loyalties that we feel toward ideas and how these may divide us, connecting the last 60 years with both the village called Eduthuruthy known to us since the earliest time, with the pact and enterprise of nation building as collective responsibility. It looks to

integrate the village as a symbol within the wider domain of Nation or Country, showing how democratic and constitutional politics is played out as performance, and the right to be different and the right to be free. Working class lives appear in the representation of shared idioms of freedom, and the shared wealth of community life: the party as it appears becomes a confederation of free men. Serious questions about gang life both with regard to men's labour in politics as well as conformity to party or family ideals is contrasted to women's role and voices in the construction of memory.

This book will be of interest to all those concerned with rethinking the role of the party and of democratic and constitutional politics. It is argued that the political practise consists of the right to be engaged in questions of freedom and justice, and sociologically foregrounds us as belonging to contemporary India as citizens of a free county.

Susan Visvanathan
Professor and Chairperson
CSSS/SSS
JNU

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Originally my Ph.D thesis, it is ten years after its completion that I have converted it into a book-form. In writing up my thesis as well as giving it the shape of a book I have taken help from many. Because it will be impossible to count them on fingers I will not be able to do justice to all here. Jawaharlal Nehru University where I completed my Ph.D in 2002 has a significant role to play in the writing of this thesis. A few friends without mentioning whose names I cannot introduce this book include Kiran, Jayasankar, Bobby, Peggy, Subrato, Shomu, Rahul, Dilip, Dwarika, Mohinder, Manmohan, Suresh, Pramod, Ilyas, Sabari, Sakunt, Sunil, Akshay, Sandip, Asutosh, Thirto, Anupam, Suparna, Bravin, Rohan, Sitara, Anupam, Zahir, Kaustav, Rajesh, Ananya, Maria, Mukesh, Rehman, Mathew, Shajahan, Sheeba, Anil, Reji, Srinivas, Srijith, Krishnakumar, George, Bharathan, Francis, Mani, Srinivasan, Anil, Sunny, Sushil, Brahm, Uddham, and Sugun. As I said this list is rather long and unending, and I think it is best to leave it as it is, i.e incomplete.

My association with the Centre for Political Studies and later with the Centre for Study of Social Systems, exposed me to the possibilities of research here. Prof. Susan Visvanathan, my supervisor has been very kind and benevolent in her understanding of my work and has made a substantial contribution to the completion of my thesis as well as the book. I do not know how to thank her for her immense help and guidance in bringing my work to this stage. Her as well as the names of Prof. Leela Dube and Prof. Barnabas examiners for my Ph.d are recalled here with gratitude.

My colleagues and students at the Department of Sociology, University of Delhi have immensely encouraged me in completing this book. The

rewriting of the thesis into a book form was mostly done during my association with the Department from 2007-12 as a research associate.

Initial conceptualization of this book was made while I was at the Calcutta Centre for Studies in Social Sciences where I was a post-doctoral fellow in 2005. I would like to thank the Social Science Research Council and their seminar on 'Boundaries of Bodies, States and Societies' held in 2004 at Raichak, West Bengal which gave me scope for a wider analysis of my work.

Last but certainly not the least, I would like to acknowledge gratitude to the students and faculty of the School of Social Sciences, Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam where I was a guest faculty for two years (2004-06), for the immense encouragement I got in taking the work of my Ph.D forward. I had my best opportunities in discussing the scope of the questions raised by my work in an inter-disciplinary environment of the School.

Of the libraries, first comes my alma mater, the JNU library. Other sources, viz. the Ratan Tata library (Delhi University), the NMML or the Teenmurti library, the CSSS library (JNU), the CHS library (JNU), the CESP-Exim bank library (JNU), the CPS library (JNU), School of Social Sciences library (M.G.Uty- Kottayam) and the Sahitya Academy library in Delhi, have been equally useful. I thank the staff of these libraries for their co-operation in tracking down the various books.

Outside the world of academics, I will have to at the outset thank my father who painstakingly went through the entire draft, pointing out mistakes in spelling and grammar. My mother has encouraged me against all odds in going ahead with the research. The material investment in bringing my thesis to the level of publication was mostly made through conversations with a number of friends of

which Bobby, Jayasankar, Hans, Ravi and Levin are the first names coming to mind. They read and gave their opinions on improving the thesis. They also helped in their own capacities as independent or affiliated researchers, writers and publishers. My cousin Pradeep has maintained a steady interest in the progress of this work since the beginning. His encouragement with criticism has helped me sustain the strength in shaping it into a book.

For my field-work, I must thank first of all late Ravi or Ravicettan who with the enduring vision of a Communist in the dialogues we had, fused harmoniously the many images of Edathiruthy's past, present as well as future. My native place, a place where even though having not lived for long, every short visit to which was memorable to me for making me grow up effortlessly was coming back to me in rock-hard concepts of politics and history during my field-work. I am grateful to my family who accommodated my rather initially ambiguous plans of writing a thesis on our native place and allowed me to interview all our kith and kin as my respondents. The nearly three years I spent studying my field from our home at Irinjalakuda which is about 8km from Edathiruthy was a period of real challenge to me. But I was not one to be defeated. The strength of every one of them who collaborated with this research helped me in this. Thattapurackal Chennukutty, Velayudhan, Panikketil Chandru, Kochupennu, Arackaparambil Aappu, Pengam, Abhimanyu, Kalarikkal Narayanan, Monappil Sankaranarayanan, Asokan, Arackaparambil Korappan, Kumbalaparambil Unniappan Master, Panchali Unniappan, Kumbalaparambil Sridharan Master, Kumbalaparambil Sudhakaran Master, Kumbalaparambil Bhushanan Master, Kumbalaparambil Joshy, Kumbalaparambil Arunan Master, all of them who knew Sardar Gopalakrishnan, the martyr as well as the man inspired me with the many tales they had to tell about him and their lives and times.

Despite all, the errors which remain are entirely mine.

INTRODUCTION

This book is about mourning. It is about mourning for a death which has been conceived as a murder but in a distinct fashion as ritualistic, as a sacrifice and as a martyrdom initiating a specific genre of democratic representation marking the birth of the Indian Republic. The person thus mourned was a school teacher and an activist of the Communist Party of India among many other things. He was killed on the first Republic day of India 26th January 1950 in a clash with the police. He had been leading a demonstration called 'Rally for the Rights of the Citizens' *pauravakasajaatha* purportedly against the high handedness of the police in the name of maintaining law and order in Nattika Firka in the erstwhile district of Malabar in the presidency of Madras.

There is no proof or evidence according to the law to the end that he was killed by the police. There are eyewitnesses to his death but none of any consequence to the law that can establish a fact of custodial death or homicide. As part of a democratic representation his death especially for those who identified with the left movement is given as a martyrdom for a cause dear to the whole nation on the very day it became a sovereign republic. But the same representation elsewhere renders him as a victim that was chosen to be sacrificed for certain values or ideals that were held to be sacred or ideal. In either case it is difficult to make any hard and fast distinction between these representations given the complexity with which these are etched.

My intention in this book is to highlight the use of these two concepts martyrdom and sacrifice in relation to their role in structuring an order of events marking the Republic day. For example for the numerically dominant Ezhava castes of the Firka he is not merely a sign of the contribution made

by them to the growth of the communist movement in the Firka but also a sacrificial victim whose loss was suffered with such intensity that given the mystery surrounding his death it is almost conceived as that of a totemic ancestor. Not to mention that such a dualism forms merely one of the various strands of representation of mourning this death though it is the most dominant one.

The mourning charts a ritualistic course in the martyrdom day commemorations popularly known as *Sardar Dinam* which falls on the 26th of January every year. Owing to his stint with the British India Air Force as a fabric worker during the days of the World War II he was addressed ever since his return as Sardar. The commemorations of his death on this day have virtually displaced the celebrations of the republic day instead marking it as a day of mourning in Nattika Firka and even more so in the village of Edathiruthy the home village of Sardar. It represents a stark visual and spectacular originality in the larger framework of the celebrations everywhere else. By means of a spectacular exhibition of the red flag of the Communists- the CPI, the CPI(M), the CPI (ML), the Red Flag and the CP(M)¹ -together and through their separate and at times united demonstrations achieved this effect. For the formation of this 'communitas' as Victor Turner addresses it (1986:84) in the Firka of Nattika the village of Edathiruthy (home to Sardar) provides a tragic core. The commemorations immortalize him as the sacrificial victim or the martyr through eulogies and praises in the form of songs, speeches, stage plays and *kathaprasangom*². Though marked by violence in its representation his death is offered as a neutralizing discourse of all hostilities. How the concept of the republic drew

¹ These are the different Communist parties in the present day Nattika Firka. At the time of the death of Gopalakrishnan there was only one Communist party which was the CPI.

² Oratory story telling- a traditional art form of South India

a signifying force that is generic to death will be one of the main concerns of this book.

In order to detail the complexities of the subject matter involved this book has been divided into eight chapters. My first two chapters have gone to show how as a student of social anthropology I framed the ambit of this study. It deals with the primary hypothesis on which this book is based. It states the problem from different points of view working on the basis of theoretical observations from the discipline as well as empirical observations from the field of inquiry.

The first chapter deals with the anthropology of death and its relation to representations-in-mourning. It tries to situate the ideas of Mauss in the context of the disintegration caused in the traditional forms of representing death. It tries to show how native forms of representation constitute new forms of totality in representing death through mourning in the newly emergent democratic discourses. The latter half of this chapter looks at the concrete expression of mourning as a mourning for a victim of a sacrifice and how the death of Sardar could be narratively plotted in the framework of a social drama conceptualized by Victor Turner.

In the second chapter as a continuation of this theme I have done an analysis of kin formation amongst the Ezhava with that of Sardar's kin in focus, to highlight the impact his death had on his kin approached as a collective. For this I have used the ways of ancestral worship in prevalence among the Ezhava and how they contribute towards building an image of a totemic ancestor around Sardar. This chapter also examines how over the years his image has been constituted and reconstituted as a martyr by the Left parties. This notwithstanding that the representations come from varied sources and

emerge with distinct forms that any community formation around such representations-in-mourning is often contingent. Yet on the strength of certain events it may be stated that the Ezhava castes and the Left parties have played a dominant role in making this sort of a mourning ritualistic

In the third chapter an analysis of the change in the land based economy of the Firka with the example of the village Edathiruthy has been done to understand how the change in fortunes of the social groups particularly the Ezhava is earmarked in the phenomenon of mourning.

The fourth chapter subjects to further analysis the peculiar position occupied by the several families of the Ezhava in the caste system in the Firka and how within the semiotic/symbolic sphere of exchange located therein a space was derived for the conception of mourning Sardar as an ancestor.

The fifth chapter is a study of the rallies, cultural festivities that form a part of the commemoration of Sardar's martyrdom and the ways in which they transform the names and places associated with it so as to give them a mythical character and the programmes a ritualistic effect. It also dwells upon the ways in which a general economy associated with the performance of rituals according to George Bataille (1991:93) sustains the use of specific names and places associated with the memory of his death and in turn serves as a link with the present.

The sixth chapter looks at the emergence of biographical narratives in the form of a heteroglossia as part of mourning. It was marked with the writing of a novel in 1969. The form of a novel in representing a heroic character of which reality and fiction combine together to portray different ideologies gave birth to heteroglossia. Its ruling idea is a notion of individual acting out of ideological beliefs rather than rational self interest. In this chapter I

describe the contents of the novel and examine how it paved the way for a new form of mourning and new representations in its wake.

The seventh chapter looks at the backdrop to the theatrical narratives of events linked to the death of Sardar. Earlier, chapter 3 already tried to situate them in relation to the anthropology of performance, which is the social and economic background to the formation of these narratives of mourning as if for a victim in a sacrifice. By contrast this chapter tries to unravel the set of unstructured representations that point to the extremes of violence in narrativizing death through feelings of pain, torture and suffering. These are studied in relation to an experimental genre of theater known as theater of cruelty that experiments with the limits of theatrical representation. This metaphor of theater is used in particular to study the lower caste untouchable mourning because theirs are the experiences of having faced the most extreme forms of violence and police brutality for joining the movements initiated by the Communist party in the Firka.

The eighth chapter is an attempt to concentrate on the limits of mourning and the closure of these representations. It tries to grapple with the theoretical edges of this research and the critical areas that are to be subsequently opened up for future research³. This chapter deals with the theoretically different possibilities within which the politics of representation in these discourses can be analysed. Philosophical writings have been used here to strengthen the anthropological route earlier taken to understand the phenomenon. The derivation of a democratic discourse from the act of mourning has been examined in this chapter in relation to discursive analysis of violence, power, secret and passion in the representations of death.

³ As a foot note to this introduction I would like to add that all the meetings with my respondents mentioned here as well as the incidents reported here were concluded before 2002 unless otherwise specified.

CHAPTER 1

THE SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY OF DEATH

The problematic of this book was conceived within the recent approaches to the study of death in ritualistic representations as sacrifice and martyrdom in the social sciences. I begin with a random survey of the writings available on these topics before moving on to contextualize it within the ritualistic aspects made available through a social anthropology of religion.

Felix Padel (2000) in his 'Sacrifice of the Human Being' looks at the significance of power and dominance tied to the use of the concept of sacrifice. It deals with the encounter of the Konds of Orissa with the colonial regime of the British. More than an ethnological inquiry into the structure and conventions of this rite; Padel's study is on colonial culture the way it was imposed on the Konds of Orissa. The Konds, a tribe in Orissa are believed to have practiced human sacrifice to propitiate the earth before the sowing of the crop. It is claimed to have been brought to an end by the colonizers on grounds of its 'savagery' or 'barbarity'. Contrary to this what Padel finds is that, "it is a practice that at least affirms that a human life is something sacred and of great value" (ibid: xiii). What outraged the colonizers was the blatant presence of violence in the conduct of the ritual. What they neglected in so doing was the kind of violence perpetrated by the Western forms of power and authority, which in imposing itself on people such as the Konds, with a 'civilizing' mission, "go beyond human sacrifice, sacrificing the essence of what it means to be human" (ibid:xiii). Padel thus posits human sacrifice of the Konds against the 'sacrifice of the human being' itself which is a much greater yet less visible and much more indirect mode of violence.

This was executed through a combination of forces – of the administrator, the colonialist who had his eyes set upon the natural wealth and resources of the tribal environment, the missionary, who wanted to save the ‘savages’ from themselves, and the anthropologist, who by producing a ‘scientific’ but dehumanizing discourse, undermined the people’s sense of who they were. In analyzing the role of the anthropologist, he is also analyzing himself, thus appreciating, the opportunity to learn the ‘mystery of being human’ that was offered through the study (ibid: xvii).

Padel’s study is an illuminating one, to the extent that he locates an ancient rite within the dynamics of its expropriation and extermination by the modern discourse of rationality and order. It shows us the various ways in which a holistic conception of a universe, a cosmos gets appropriated by a centralized, colonial power and order.

Nandini Sunder (1995), in a similar strain grapples with the colonial records of alleged human sacrifice in 19th century Bastar. This was the point when the British administration was struggling to make inroads into the thickly forested heartland of India. It was believed that, the human sacrifice was made to the Goddess Danteswari at the behest of the King. Therefore confronting the sacrifice became as much necessary for the British as winning over the authority from the Raja, which it successfully did, even suppressing a rebellion that broke out in 1876. The colonial administration, but, was not satisfied with that, and was determined to uproot the “barbarous” rite of sacrificing human beings to propitiate the Gods. But, even after successive depositions before the judiciary the investigative officers of the administration could not find any conclusive evidence to the fact that such a practice really existed. It nevertheless led to the marking of

the land in the colonial map and “the way had now been paved for the theft of land”.

Nandini Sunder looks at the allegation of the rite of sacrifice and not its practice as such. Regarding the existence of the rite as such, there was no proof to determine whether it was ever there and/or if it continues to be. Sunder’s analysis of the colonial reports go to show at least one event summarily, that of the removal of the Raja of Bastar from his throne in 1883, on allegations of giving orders for human sacrifice, even though such allegations could not be substantiated in a court of Law. The study shows us the incompatibility of thoughts that were thrown up by the colonialists, when their ideals of Christian self-sacrifice, encountered the ‘barbarity’ of human sacrifice.

Lawrence.A.Babb (1998) discusses the role of sacrifice in a far more recent context of Indian society. His focus is on how sacrifice serves to create new social groups from the existing ones. The example of the trading community of Aggarwals in North India, located around Agra, Jaipur and Delhi, is discussed in this context. The rites of sacrifice among them, according to Babb, symbolize a rite of passage from the identity of being Kshatriyas to Vaisyas. Sacrifice also constitutes an integral dimension of the myth of origin of the community. The myth tells the story of the community’s ancestor called King Agrasen who is immortalized through his vow of abjuring all acts of violence. Babb links the origin of three other trading communities – the Khandelwal Vaisyas, Khandelwal Jains and Maheswaris- from the same region, through similar vows to abjure violence and practice vegetarianism. The Khandelwal Vaisyas believe they were the descendants of Rsi Jamadagni who brought the carcass of a deer that he killed to the sacrificial site set up by the King of Khandela. The ascetic Durvasa who was

officiating at the sacrifice, was enraged at Jamadagni's act of defiling the site, and killed him. Later, upon the bequest of his wife, he was resurrected by Durvasa himself. But, he was no longer a Brahmin. The cult of non-vegetarianism and non-violence for these communities take roots from such mythical tales, that bespeak of an emotional ambiguity towards the act of violence as such, which is an integral part of all sacrifices (Girard:1988). Though unrelated to specific historic circumstances, Babb's analysis does not fail to take note of the states of transgression of the rules of hierarchy from where new social groups and new social identities emerge.

A study by Linda Isako Angst (2001) points to the importance of specific historic circumstances which through association with themes of sacrifice help create sub-national identities. Angst explores one of the ways in which a community identifies itself with the image of a sacrificial victim, in the process of engaging in a wider political discourse. In September, 1995, three U.S. service-men brutally gang-raped a twelve year old school girl, in the island of Okinawa, Japan. The service-men belonged to the occupying US Forces in Okinawa. The author analyses how the issue of rape was enlisted in the political discourse that followed, for its powerful symbolic potential: Okinawa as a sacrificed daughter. The essay imaginatively captures the portrayal of Okinawa's sub-nationalism within the periphery of Japanese nationalism, as a daughter who has been sold into prostitution. The mythical fusion of territory and nationality, through the use of the trope of sacrificial victim- or the sacred daughter- constituted the bulwark of Okinawa's identity ever since the World War, when it was that such an identity, first ever discovered. The Himeyuri(or Maiden Lily) Student Nurse Corps, is another prominent icon of modern Okinawan victim-hood, says the author. In 1945, 219 of the Himeyuri who accompanied the Japanese soldiers in the War,

were mostly killed, trapped between the U.S. and Japanese soldiers. The Himeyuri thus began the iconography of Okinawa within the larger context of Japanese nationalism as the sacrificial victim. The author points out how the rape of the school girl as a violation of one girl's body, is equated with, the violation of Okinawa's body-politic, in media representation. It signals a re-orientation of the rape from the private/personal to the public/political realm in political interpretation. The author argues that, when women are thus objectified into symbols, they are also compromised in their Human Rights. The construction of the homogenous identity of Okinawa as a sacrificial victim/prostituted daughter, does not serve to strategically voice the true individuality of the social group- Okinawa women- that such identity seeks to represent. This study has several parallels with my own problem, though the historic peculiarities and the need for ethnological analysis for understanding the domain of representation calls for difference in approach.

If, such are some of the theoretical contexts in which the concept of sacrifice finds its explication, the concept of martyrdom emerges as a total contrast to this. If sacrifice in all its facets is bound by tradition and orthodoxy, martyrdom is "untethered by tradition" (Eliade:1986:Vol.9:231). According to *The Encyclopaedia of Religion* (Eliade:1986) the word is derived from a Greek term from which the word martyr is etymologically derived and it means a "witness". It says, "martyrdom, by placing ideology ahead of physical survival, affirms the priority of culture over nature and the group's life, law and civilization over biological self-interest" (ibid:233). Martyrdom is a progressive mark in crescive societies⁴ that are on their way towards self-determination and are oriented towards growth of social and cultural

⁴ A crescive society is one that is weak, but on the rise (Klausner:1998).

freedom. The Encyclopaedia cites as examples, the Irish Republican Army soldiers and the early Christian missionaries. Self-determining societies have achieved total political control over themselves and cults of martyrdom in such societies are active, guiding the society in its expansion, openly propagandizing, sending missionaries to the unconverted, and warring against adversaries. By contrast, in a decaying society martyrdom is latent. Adversary claims mere victims who affirm no ideology by their death. They are opposed as passive victims to sacred witnesses or as political pawns to proud martyrs (ibid.).

Manocher Dorraj's essay (1997) on Iranian political culture tries to locate the place ascribed to the Shi'ite cult of martyrdom in asserting the value of tradition in directing Iranian politics. Dorraj, citing Frend (1967) ascribes the tradition of martyrdom to the religions of Judaism and Christianity as well. Such tradition preaches that only through examples of martyrdom can the believers prove themselves worthy servants of God.

Speaking of the ethnological roots of the cult of martyrdom in the South Indian tradition Susan Bailey (1989) points at a form of heroism emerging from the war like power divinities, at the village level or lineage level. According to her it also explains the martial roots of the warrior kingships that ruled most of South India in pre-colonial times. This heroism was open to severe challenges and is seen fighting oddities of nature and culture, in localized narratives of praise or hagiographies, often meeting with its end in violent conflicts and other mishaps. It is following such disastrous consequences in their lives, that many of them earn a divine visage, posthumously. The significant light in which Bailey examines them is that, it is around these divinities that cultural symbiosis began with Islam and Christianity, in South India. As the author says, "to a large extent the success

of Muslim Sufi teachers and Christian missionaries in the region were to depend on their capacity to set up some kind of viable relations with these divinities” (ibid:69). The Teyyam (a performance ritual of Northern Kerala) deities, especially are of such a genre. Susan Bailey also discusses the local nature of the worship of these deities, which means how they have formed instruments of local organization and identification, through specific village or clan based rituals and hagiographies celebrating the heroics of the particular warrior, deity, demon or the king, all of which holds essentially the same position in terms of the power they wield, irrespective of a social demarcation of their roles as virtuous or vicious/ good or bad. These deities have to be propitiated, irrespective of any of these considerations, because they represent the energies that activate and sustain the universe. Bailey cites the instance of an Englishman, who was also incorporated into this pantheon and who died valiantly fighting against the Marthanda Varma of Travancore in 1809. Offerings of brandy and tobacco were made to this new deity, to appease his fiery tastes and appetites (ibid:34). The cult of heroism discussed in this book with respect to Sardar has much to share with that of the Teyyam deities although that in itself will be a subject for a different area of research. The contemporaneity of the observation of Sardar’s death as martyrdom raises more questions than could be answered within its ethnological roots.

These works are substantially helpful in bringing to our understanding many of the features revealed with respect to my area of inquiry. But in the present case the fact that there is no proof or documentary evidence to the fact that Sardar was killed by the police even though there are eyewitnesses to his death. But they are not of any consequence especially to the extent that he/she can establish a fact of custodial death or homicide has transferred the

responsibility of sustaining the fact on to the people of the Firka. A new space had to be created for the perception that a person's life has been sacrificed for a cause dear to the whole Nation on the very day it became a Sovereign Republic. This historicity once established added cultural dimensions to it bringing me to my primary hypothesis in the study; the hypothesis that the community, in mourning, sought to represent death as a total social phenomenon so as to sustain its meaning in the manner of traditional, archaic or primitive societies. Therefore for a methodological understanding of how a totality is constituted around the phenomenon of death I focus on the work of Marcel Mauss who has formulated the representation of death as a totality.

To begin with, the concept of total social phenomenon was derived by the French Social Anthropologist, Marcel Mauss from a survey of ethnographies of the culture of the 'primitive people'. According to Mauss in the "total social phenomena, as we propose to call them, all kinds of institutions find simultaneous expression: religious, legal, moral and economic. In addition, the phenomena have their aesthetic aspect and they reveal morphological types "(Mauss, 1970 :1). The concept as such assumes the primacy of the social in all forms of thought.

To look at death as an example of such phenomena one can consider the types of death caused by the individual intuitively on himself following a violation of a taboo - for example the eating of a totem animal amongst the Wakelbura tribe of Australia - described by Mauss (1979:35-47). In these societies such deaths seek expiation from the sin through the slow pining away to death of the individual. In these examples, it is acting against the instinct of self-preservation, that the individuals, invite death upon themselves. The collective idea of death becomes the bedrock of his/ her

slow progress towards total self-consumption as opposed to the instinct of total self-preservation of the enlightened modern rational man. Mauss indicates, in a vein of self-criticism, how the culture that Mauss represents, is prone to see these facts as cases of collective or individual hysteria; with the afflicted as country bumpkins to be treated in hospitals (ibid:54). For the culture that Mauss represents these facts have “constituted the matrix from which our moral strength has slowly disengaged itself” (ibid:54). Here he links it up with the concept of *homo duplex* introduced by Durkheim (1952) in his study of suicide. The *homo duplex* in Mauss’ explanation refers to the dualistic nature of the human personality- “sensible of our persons and resistant of the collectivity” (Mauss,1979:54). Truly enough as Mauss claims, his idea is to extend the theory of anomic suicide to the study of non western social phenomenon (ibid:54) and gain fresh insights from it.

In the mourning for the death of Sardar there is also an example of how modernizing society(ies) is in itself capable of a generative violence that marks sacrificial acts of archaic or primitive societies(Girard:1988:269-73). Such representations also help assume a totality in the face of ‘dissociation’ (Durkheim:1952) begotten by the modernization with regard to instances of individual death that resemble anomic death (not necessarily suicide; but all instances of violent or accidental and unnatural deaths that fall outside the conventional praxis of morality and religion in a society). In the process however such instances of death are transformed by their act of generative violence into the foundation for the formation of a new cult if not, a new religion. Robert Hertz (1960) also shed light on the comprehensive totality with which a society mourns death. Every death is more than merely the loss of an individual life. It is a time for the members of the society to renew structural arrangements and to renew communal ties. There is a process of

mental disintegration followed by synthesis behind all funerary rites and “it is only when this process is completed that society, its peace recovered, can triumph over death” (Hertz:1960:86).

Thus mourning, in its representation of death as a total social phenomenon, seeks to represent not just any singular aspect of society but its various aspects such as legal, political, economic and aesthetic, all at once. If we read this phenomenon of mourning in the words of Mauss, it forms a nutshell of the existing social relationships of the society (Mauss:1970:1).

In the course of the study methodologically I have structurally interpreted the phenomenon of mourning. But the first phase of stating the problematic evolved after the first round of field study. This was the classification of the mourners into the communities of sacrifice and martyrdom, of which martyrdom as a concept was evoked similar to the context in which it was used in religion as working within the binaries of gift and sacrifice (see Visvanathan(1993) below).

These themes find their expression in the mourning of the death of Sardar in different ways. Those who mourn him as a martyr see in him a person who willingly laid down his life for the sake of certain values that he considered ideal. Those others who mourn him as a victim see a contrivance of chances/circumstances of a historic period by which he was chosen to be sacrificed for certain values or ideals that are bound by tradition to be sacred or ideal. A martyr is a significant ideal of progress, growth and ambition, whereas a victim is the opposite of all these and is relevant to the community of mourners in demonstrating to them that such a ‘fate’ is open to everyone and Sardar’s death points to the reality that there is no escaping from it for an individual whose life has been thus destined.

Theories of sacrifice drew from a colonial imaginary of ethnographic writing for the scientific analysis of religious practices that were pagan by definition. Thus for example Sir James Frazer (1932) cites examples from the Sioux tribes of the American Northwest and the Konds of India who are reported to have practiced human sacrifice. Frazer treats them as part of agrarian rites, performed in order to propitiate the Earth Goddess for good harvest. The victim was treated with special reverence and deference before the sacrifice. The body of the victim after he/she was slain was partly consumed by the priest and the sacrificing community or group and then buried in the fields at various places in a just distribution amongst the families or clans participating in the sacrifice. Amongst the Konds, the victims were called the Meriahs and were bought, patronized and kept within the tribe for the single purpose of sacrificing for the Goddess Earth. The blood of the victim when mixed with Earth was believed to deepen the redness in the colour of the turmeric cropped; which basically meant a healthy crop (ibid:434-438).

The sacrificial victim may be treated here as either inhering the spirit of the divinity to whom he/she is sacrificed, or the spirit of the crop to ensure whose fertility the sacrifice is made. Frazer concludes from the ethnographic details at his disposal that it is difficult to conclude what the true nature of the sacrifices is.

In due course there also emerged a search for the meaning of sacrifice in the way ancient scriptural religions dealt with it. Although this area is too vast, I consider here as an example the work of Ananda Coomaraswamy who holds sacrifice to be the central principle of diversification from the cosmic union, that existed in “the beginning” according to the Vedas. This “beginning” is the apocryphal beginning common to all religions. “In this eternal beginning there is only the supreme identity of “that one” (tad ekam) without

differentiation of being from non-being light from darkness or separation of sky from earth ”(Coomaraswamy:1975: 6).The indivisible one may be embodied in the person, progenitor, mountain, tree, dragon or the endless serpent. The one has to be sacrificed to make way for the many. And so is born the dragon-slayer to supplant the father and take possession of his kingdom. The gods impose passion upon the dragon, the person, the father or the indivisible one or he chooses it voluntarily, to be the sacrificial victim. The sacrificer and the victim are of one mind behind the scenes, but the dragon father- “He is Death, on whom life depends” (ibid: 7).

The implication of the victim is more than mere implication. It is actually his complicity in the sacrifice. Therefore, the agreement of the victim is uppermost in sacrifice. According to Vedic sacrifice thus, “in the first case, the deity is multiply born in living beings, in the second they are reborn in him” (ibid:9).The humanity thus born dismembers itself daily through the forms of its knowledge, or rather ignorance, from which the only expiation is provided for in sacrifice. Even though the victim’s will is complicit to the sacrifice it is nonetheless an act of cruelty and even treachery and this is the original sin of Gods in which all men participate by their separate existence and forms of knowledge based on good and evil, subject and object.

In more recent times post-structuralist philosophy also engaged with the theme in a very important way. Derrida (1995) for instance looks at death with reference to the meaning it assumes in sacrifice in monotheistic religions where God demands the sacrifice from his followers and is deemed the act of investiture of responsibility/ethics on the sacrificer. Implicit is also an act of differentiation of Being, spawning from the gaze of the infinite Other or God; seeing everything without being seen (Derrida:1995). In that sacrifice provides the expiatory ritual for the differentiated existence of

human lives there is a striking resemblance between the Vedic and Semitic religions. Still, as regards the choice of a victim, the story of Abraham gives room to intense emotional ambivalence till finally his victim his son Isaac is substituted with a goat by God. This ambivalence has provided for a symbolism that expresses a closure of responsibility in the story, a closure that cannot be communicated or expressed through the character of Abraham. Derrida quoting Kierkegaard says, on the sacrifice of Abraham that, time and again, he (Kierkegaard), admits that he does not understand Abraham nor deems himself capable of doing what he (Abraham) did (ibid:80). This symbolism is imagined within a secret that is apart from the discourse of sameness or homogeneity of the quotidian life. Derrida calls it, the “Jewish experience of a secret, hidden, separate, absent, or mysterious God, the one who decides, without revealing his reasons, to demand of Abraham that most cruel, impossible and untenable gesture: to offer his son Isaac as sacrifice. All that goes on in secret”(ibid: 58).

So what we have here are theories of sacrifice that defy a general or scientific explanation. Sacrifice succeeds the beginning in Judaism and exposes a crisis of responsibility reflected in the father figure of Abraham, which sacrifice is in fact the foundation of all creation in Hinduism. It must be reiterated that the symbolic rather than truth value of these representations is what is valuable for understanding how the act of mourning works in the context of this study.

But it is with respect to the writings of Freud on the origins of religion, of totemism as the religion of primitives that we find the initial breakthrough for entering the field of my study. The expiatory character of sacrifice was identified by Freud in his study of totemism. Sacrifice was a rite to mourn the act of the original sin of parricide in founding the savage community.

Partaking of the meal or the body of the slain victim was a communion binding the brothers in their faith of originally slaying their father (Freud:1950:140-46).

So in Freud (1950:141), the sacrifice is equated to a parricide, that stands remorsefully at the root of all annual ceremonies or rites of martyrdom. Guilt is the unifying element in the proliferation of totemic representations that follow from this original sin that aim at the expiation from the sin of the parricide. If the parricide cited by Freud is more of symbolic significance, in mourning the sacrifice of Sardar or in his rites of martyrdom lies the representation of a historic event.

This brings us to my point of departure which is based on the search in the ritualistic mourning of the death of Sardar for certain phenomena that revealed in itself a totality of social relationships that can be studied for its economic, legal or juridical representations. Therefore I turn to a structural interpretation of mourning which we gain from the collectivist theories of Durkheim and Mauss who paved the way for structuralism.

‘Sacrifice :Its Nature and Functions’ (1898:1964) by Marcel Mauss and Henri Hubert looks at sacrifice as one of the original and archaic forms of collective representation. The definite aspects of its (sacrifice’s) portrayal of the Universe and the specific allocations of roles – both human and divine, sacred and profane – to its participants, makes it a conclusive theory of sacrifice. The act of sacrifice is located at the axis of a world that is divided between the sacred and the profane, any exchange between the two shall be ordained as and through sacrifice.

Hubert & Mauss’ theory is general and comparative. Examples are drawn from all religions and all forms of sacrifice (human and otherwise, largely

the 'soma' sacrifice of the Vedas) and they show how the various actors in the sacrifice are integrated through a unifying theme, characteristic of sacrifice.

Even prior to Mauss, Robertson Smith shed light on sacrifice drawing from the study of primitive religions. He found the clue to sacrifice in totemism. Robertson Smith saw in totemism not merely the religion of the primitives but also the early stages of the Arab and the Semitic family. Sacrifice was the renewal of a covenant, 'the blood covenant' that bound the association of the clan together. According to him it was a "common meal at which the devotees, by eating the totem, assimilated it to themselves, were assimilated to it and became allied with each other or with it" (Hubert&Mauss:1964: 5).

But the totem animals were soon to be replaced by domestic animals and later when all kinship between men and animals had ceased to be understood by the Semites (a point raised also by Rodney Needham in his preface to Levi-Strauss' Totemism (1964:3), where he said that 'totemic illusion' arose due to the discontinuity between man and nature that Christian thought held to be essential), human sacrifice replaced animal sacrifice (probably the stage of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac).

The sacrifice gradually took root as the gift- sacrifice of the domestic herder, making a gift to the God through his sacrifice. The shedding of blood, nonetheless attached a similarity between the rites of punishment (implying thus a system for justice) and sacrifice "that gave a punitive character to communions of piacular origin and transformed them into expiatory sacrifices" (Hubert&Mauss:1964: 4).

Evans-Pritchard's study of the religion of the Nuer give us further insights into the nature of sacrifice, on the gift-sacrifice of the domestic herder that

Robertson Smith and Mauss also wrote about. He threw light on the possibility of substitution for the sacrificed victim in bloody sacrifices not without retaining its basic characteristics. Writing about the Nuer (Evans-Pritchard:1956), he showed us how the offerings of cucumber to God, can take the place of bloody sacrifice after they are consecrated. The sacrifices amongst the Nuer can be expiatory rites as well as rites of passage. Thus the expiatory or propitiatory sacrifice is made to absolve person(s) from sin or to avert a great danger or misfortune. A sacrifice indicating the rites of passage is done on occasions of initiation, marriage, death etc. reinforcing a sense of community. Evans-Pritchard classifies the former as personal sacrifice and the latter as collective sacrifice. This distinction may also be read as piacular and confirmatory. The Nuer sacrifice differs from agrarian sacrifice in that they do not intend to control variations in nature as in rainfall, sun, fertility of soil etc. Being cattle-herders, they are resigned to these variations in nature and sacrifice amongst them pertain to spiritual and moral crises. Yet, they retain the essential nature of sacrifice in performing the two functions identified by Mauss and Hubert that of prestations and justice (ibid:197-286).

Mauss also posits the question of the nature of the victim that reflects and inheres within it the vitality of a collective. It (the victim) mediates an exchange between the sacrificer-a community, individual or society- and God. The view that holds sacrifice as a communion ignores the vitality of the victim. The victim is necessarily destroyed at the altar of sacrifice. If, it is a goat that is sacrificed, then its throat is slit. Thus, it is totally different from charitable oblations of any kind. "In the case of sacrifice, the religious energy released is stronger" (Hubert&Mauss:1964:12), which meant it had a function more than a mediation of exchange or a presence exceeding the piaculum.

At the same time, it does not amount to saying that there are no rites of communion associated with sacrifice. The same is true of expiatory rites. The point Mauss argues for looking at the classifications of sacrifice followed in the Hebraic and Vedic texts is that “they are too diverse, yet too similar for it to be possible to divide them into overspecialized categories. They are all the same in essence and it is the same which constitutes their unity”(ibid: 18). Yet in distinguishing sacrifice from charitable forms of worship Mauss sought to bring it closer to the idea of conceptualizing death and its form in collective representations like rituals of mourning.

Although Mauss’ understanding of religion took a different direction from sacrifice to those of exchange and gift which, fifty two years later, he propounded as a system of total prestations and a form of exchanging material commodities that is distinctly removed from any concept of an economic rationality, his considerations on sacrifice continue to have their relevance. The close kinship in which these two concepts work in the study of religion is amply illustrated in the work of Visvanathan (see below). From my point of view the co-existence of the two concepts, sacrifice and gift enables one to extend the symbolism of death from that of religion or tradition to newer forms of representation, necessitated by specific historic junctures. In short it helps conceptualize and represent history by ethnographic means.

To explore the details of this, I take up Hubert and Mauss again where they distinguish the sacrifice of the God as the commonest form of sacrifice that “has penetrated into the most recent religions and given rise to beliefs and practices still current” (Hubert & Mauss: 1964: 7). They consider it an agrarian rite in which there is a close affinity or better, an identification between the victim and the God. For example, Dionysus with Ram, Rudra

with Bull, Adonis with Corn, Soma with Soma-the plant, Varuna with Barley etc., where “like is offered to like and the victim is the food of the gods” (ibid: 91). Soma the moon god is represented as the archetype of heavenly sacrificers in the Vedas. But Soma is also at another level a natural quality omnipresent as in the food of the gods, in the intoxicating drink of men, in the sun, the moon, as the nourishing principle in nature etc. In soma as the victim all these forms are combined. They are concentrated, created and distributed anew by sacrifice. The sacrifice of Soma is the epitome of self-less sacrifice which is necessarily present in all sacrifices of God. They conclude that the concept of God sacrificing himself is, “the highest expression and, as it were, the ideal limit of abnegation, in which no apportionment occurs ” (ibid: 101). In God here is fused the entire meaning of sacrifice- all its actors and participants - the sacrificer, the sacrificer (the priest) and the victim enter into each other and become mixed together. Such mixing, however, is possible only for mythical, that is ideal beings.

From this point of view it can also be seen that the concept of martyrdom, though it resembles that of the sacrifice of God, may be seen to substitute the victim with not God, but a god-like figure. In the historic study of religion this concept of martyrdom has great significance when seen as sacrifice. Although not so pointed out by Mauss, Christianity with its faith in the sacrifice of Christ, may be said to be the religion that has popularized this idea of sacrifice the most. But in place of mythical or ideal beings, it substituted a god-figure that of Christ, who was also part human. Christ is often considered the first martyr himself and hence the spirit of mourning martyrs which was strongest in early Christianity(Eiade:op.cit).

This concept of the sacrifice of God in its identification of the victim and god which also makes it the commonest form of sacrifice helps one

conceptualize the spirit of mourning the death of Sardar as a victim and also a martyr. As a martyr his identification is made with though not god himself, but a god-figure who at the moment of his martyrdom not only bore, as a sacrificial victim, the punishment for a crime perpetrated by the police but also in a supreme moment of revelation represented the spirit of a nation as a Republic. As a martyr the way he is held sacred has resonances in Christianity and the way it has worshipped the figure of Jesus Christ as a sacrificial victim for the revelatory nature of his death that revealed to the Christian world the sins of humanity.

In a study of the Christians of Kerala, Susan Visvanthan (1993) points out how the concepts of sacrifice and gift are intertwined and indispensable in articulating positions of worship. In an analysis of the person of Christ in the Eucharistic rites among the Syrian Christians the author points to the constitution of a god-figure in Christ through the collective notions of gift and sacrifice.

The person of Christ is mourned by these Christians at two levels- the liturgical and popular. At the liturgical level, the author argues that with the emergence of strong patriarchal sentiments in the 18th century reformations in the Syrian Jacobite church of Kerala the role of Mary started diminishing. A diminishing of the role of Mary implied a diminishing of the person of Christ or Christ as a man and his passions. The mythic consciousness itself that ordains the belief and lives of the lay Christians were thus exposed to transformation in the role of Mary in the liturgy.

But the Eucharist was used by the believers to act as a leveler in maneuvering the idea of God, through the person of Christ, thus giving a longer lease of life for older traditions of the myth. The Eucharist was used

to do this by bringing in the performative play of the ideas of gift and sacrifice into the life of Christ. The author says that, for these Christians “Gift and Sacrifice are inextricably interwoven: for as the birth of Christ was a gift, his sacrifice was also a gift” (Visvanathan: 1993:173).

In the mourning for Sardar, when he is mourned as a martyr, his death can be understood in the way the god-figure of Christ has been analysed by Visvanathan. The death of Sardar, while being considered a sacrifice, was also a gift to a new Republic by virtue of which he became a martyr like Christ. This concept of sacrifice that also includes the definition of martyrdom as a gift of death can be helpful in understanding how mourning for Sardar actually assumes the representative character it has today.

In this review so far I have focussed on mourning as forms of collective representation that seeks a totality by representing death in the face of events generated in the wake of modernization. Before we proceed to do an empirical research on these representations, there is one more significant aspect with which the phenomenon of mourning is associated. It is to the theoretical aspect of transformation that I wish to draw attention here. Given the nature of mourning that resorts to extra legal, extra constitutional means of recording events and therefore representing history by remaining external to history properly speaking the process of transformation it represents has to be defined in a ritualistic sense. Thus I again take up the mourning of Sardar’s death ritualistically as sacrifice and martyrdom from the perspective of ritual as social drama.

Social Drama

A social drama takes shape out of the attribution of a definite direction and purpose to a flow of events. Drama is derived from the Greek term *dran*, “to

do”, and in Greek drama means a “deed” or “act” and was only later applied to an action represented on stage. It is a genre of performance universal to all cultures just like ritual, carnival, film and spectacle. All dominant genres of performance constitute what is called a liminal phenomena. A limen ,as the French Ethnologist Arnold Van Gennep (1960:10-11) pointed out is a threshold, the central of the three phases in what he called, “rites of passage”.

The three phases or sub-divisions of the rites of passage according to Van Gennep is rites of separation, transition rites and rites of incorporation. They may be also classified as pre-liminal, liminal and post-liminal (VanGennep:1960:10). The ‘social drama’ a concept styled by Victor Turner after the ‘rites of passage’ of Van Gennep which he held as the generative realm in culture of all performance genres including theater, rtitual, games and carnivals have four instead of the original three phases of the ‘rites of passage’. These are, breach of regular social relations, crisis representing the threshold or limen between stable phases of the social process, redressive action implying various modes (ritualistic, rational or otherwise)of resolving the crisis and reintegration of the disturbed social group, with a recognition of the social conflict that caused the breach. A ‘social drama’ is the process by which a society deals with the conflict- situations in the modern-secular society or a pre-modern atavistic society alike(Turner:1986:74).

Of the three phases of the ‘rites of passage’, the second phase forms the generative realm of theater, of marginality or liminality that puts everything into the subjunctive mood as well as the reflexive voice, dissolve all factual and common sense systems into their components and “play” with them in ways never found in nature or in custom, at least at the level of direct perception(Turner:1986:25). Central to the concept of social drama is the

aspect of liminality derived from the word *limen*, meaning threshold, it is the central in the three phases of “the rites of passage”. The three phases were derived from his observation of ritual experiences in different regions and different societies of the world. “Rituals separated specified members of a group from everyday life, placed them in a limbo that was not any place they were in before, and not yet any place they would be in, then returned them, changed in some way, to mundane life” (Turner: 1986 :25).

The Liminal stage dissolves all factual and common sense systems of quotidian life and play with them in a subjunctive mood⁵ detached from all direct correspondences to reality. In mourning the death of Sardar, the liminal stage becomes most essential, given the fact that his death is a legally unproven or judicially unexamined fact. The liminal stage opens in its uncertainty or non-ascertainability of the death of Sardar, according to the Law. The Law presumes innocence and in the indicative mood points to nothingness in the space of Sardar’s death. It is the subjunctive mood of liminality that ascertains positively the fact of his death, and in so doing opens up a huge possibility of meaning in his death as opposed to the nothingness that the Law in its indicative mood has fastened itself to. The liminal phase thus heralded in through the signifiers of a space of death and

⁵ Subjunctive and indicative are mutually contrasting moods of signification according to Turner (1986). In the indicative mood, there is a direct correspondence of the signifier to the signified, whereas in the subjunctive mood, there is a broader leeway of meaning, so that the signifier and the signified may not correspond exactly in a one-to-one relationship. The subjunctive opens up the possibility for transformations of an object from something that it is in the indicative mood of quotidian life to a wider possibility of meaning. A piece of stone according to indicative signification may be a sacrificial altar in subjunctive signification. A branch of the discipline that critiques the visual media, from an anthropological perspective. Ethnographic film-making beginning with the *Nanook of the North* by Richard Flaherty (1922), through the works of David and Judith McDougall, Robert Gardner has evolved into a distinctive academic field today. Visual anthropology trains the methodology of classical anthropology to critique the media of the film as study and representation. The main writers of this field include Michael Taussig, Martin Jay, Homi Bhabha, try to locate art forms, or rituals in the specificity of their cultural contexts, thus deconstructing their fetishism and the autonomy of the market forces such fetishism helps to grow.

its mourning, twists and turns through a multitude of heroic representations, dramatizing the character of Sardar, along with the rest, until finally summing in a rendezvous with the same Law, from which the liminal phase took its parting from. This rendezvous or 'redressal' is realized through an affirmation of the sovereignty of the collective on the 26th of January every year.

A question that may be very aptly raised in this context is about the disregard for Law. Upendra Baxi (1993) has raised this question in relation to subaltern studies and the apparent disregard for Law in them. For example, he cites, Ranajit Guha's 'Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency', which according to him, "celebrates the violence of the law and the law of violence" (ibid:249). What Baxi alleges Guha of doing is, valorizing 'crime'. He says, "If the violence of the law converts an act of insurgency into a series of crimes, the law of violence seeks to valorize 'crime' as a pathway to justice" (ibid:249). As a final result of this, the subaltern historian becomes a victim of the colonial law as any of the subject he studies. Even though not a study of subaltern history, the subject matter of my research has much in common with that branch of inquiry. But at the same time it cannot but be impossible without the ways of anthropological inquiry to reveal the cultural undercurrents related to the study of themes like violence outside the law but are in fact meant to endorse or de facto represent the same law. A study by Shahid Amin (1996) on the episode of the burning of the police station at Chauri Chaura that led to its being narrated as part of the history of the national movement which was to be narrated in order to be forgotten is relevant here. It is this mood of remembering and forgetting that is called a subjunctive mood and in the light of present study the act of mourning is no exception.

In comparing and contrasting ritual and drama as distinct performative genres, Victor Turner tells us that in performance they serve the similar function of reflecting on the quotidian life in a subjunctive mood and not quotidian the indicative. Crossing the limen, the threshold, and entering the subjunctive world of the drama or the ritual, filled with tropes, metaphors, metonymy etc., to endow these alternative worlds with magical, festive or sacred power, creates an aggregate of selves in a community or society, metaphorically thought of as a self. This is the world from where role allocations begin to the various actors.

The fact that this dynamic is true equally of the ritual and the drama (Turner includes, carnival, film and spectacle as well in the performative genre), helps us to conceptualize the stories about Sardar's death, as a drama, in its intricate sign formations and role allocations.

The analogies of ritual and drama offer an insight into the understanding of the dynamics of the Communist insurgency or underground in the Nattika firka of 1948-52. The works of Turner (1986) and Richard Schechner (1988) in contrasting the structure of ritual and theater and the further comparison of these with the skeletal framework of social conflicts, prove extremely resourceful, in this context. Turner says that the aesthetic form of theater is inherent in socio-cultural life itself; which he calls the "social drama" (discussed above).

Theater, as is popularly conceived, is an art form, that is practised by only theater professionals. This notion maintains strict demarcation or differentiation between the profession of acting and the so-called real life. With regard to the death of Sardar this cannot be true. Here we have to derive the understanding of the subject from anthropological explorations

into the idea of theater as a distinct cultural form that is universal to civilizations (Schechner:1988:6).The basic apprehension herein being that theater is not something always confined to a Stage, enacted according to a prepared Script, under the supervision of a Director. Theater, in the context of our study, is a compact performative genre, that does not require any of the above-mentioned pre-requisites, but thrives on a specific form of human agency⁶, that objectifies into a distinct totality through an act or performance of fatal significance (in terms of its prognosis), to the individual and the society. As seen with the representation of the death of Sardar, theater is regarded by the society as an example, an embodiment of its supreme values and virtues. But this theater of sacrifice represents much more than that. The violence with which it is born and the confrontation and challenge that it throws on the existing order of things make it an act of subversion at its moment of enactment. In its brush with an oppressing order of reality the human agency breathes out an elaborate sequence of events that constitute the script of theater. The plight of human condition, ineluctability of a tragic end and self-denying resistance to any force or domination beget the hallmarks of this theater of sacrifice as linked to forms of power. Spaces of social life and categories of collective thought and imagination that would otherwise be decimated under the tag of convention and hence feared for the order of repression that they symbolized in the undemocratic stages of the history of society are sought to be resuscitated through the perpetuation of this theater of sacrifice. It is such a form of theater that we witness in the concatenation of events narrated in mourning the death of Sardar, that which Turner addresses by his concept, social drama.

⁶ The agency mentioned here is the same as that present in the universals of human culture as play, games, sports, theater and ritual (Schechner, 1988:6).

The social drama is a mirror (not a planar, but a matricial or magical mirror; meaning, as a genre of cultural performance, “they exaggerate, invert, re-form, magnify, minimize, dis-color, re-color, even deliberately falsify chronicled events” , (Turner:1986:42)) on the social consciousness and hence the parallel structures found in the two versions of the drama – the social and the aesthetic. In both versions of theater the driving force or agency behind the structure is a ‘spontaneous communitas’ which is a liminoid phase that is born and consummated within the phases of breach and re-integration. The communitas is the revolutionizing agent between the phases of crisis and redressive action. Turner’s hypothesis is that the forms of theater and its sub-genres derive from the ritual processes of redressal rather than the legal-judicial or political processes of redressal (in the case of Sardar’s death the latter is conspicuous by its absence).

The mourning of Sardar is rooted firmly in the local signifiers of representation, be it that of martyrdom or that of sacrifice. This is a matter of further analysis in the next chapter.

The central event of these narratives is a rally (the rally for citizens’ rights or the *pauravakasajatha*), that intonates the original event (a social drama, in the terms of Turner) that took Sardar’s life. This transformation – the transformation of the original event into its enacted form - is made possible through the mimetic form of theater whence proceeds the distinctively modern allotments of roles and stages in the narratives mourning the death of Sardar.

Regarding the role of sacrifice in social drama, Turner writes, “It (the application of redressive or remedial procedures in a social drama) may also or additionally be in the metaphorical or symbolic idiom of the ritual

process, and not infrequently involves an act of sacrifice, in which the tensions and animosities of the disturbed community are discharged by the immolation (real or in token form) of living subjects or valued objects”(ibid: 35).Turner’s thesis on sacrifice in the social drama, finds a near-to-perfect illustration in the representation of the death of Sardar.

Communists, when they went underground and in hiding, in fact entered this realm of imagination and became iconic presentations of the social drama. The metaphor of the underground accentuates the element of theatricality in the recollections of their revolt.

Asokan’s- a respondent- memories retell the *dramatis personae* of the Communists in the underground, and illustrates how the whole movement is conceptualized in the form of a drama. A member –activist of the CPI(M), today, he was in his teens when he joined the Communist movement following the Independence. A study class was organized by the comrades for the fresh incumbents into the movement. One of the teachers was Sardar. In one of the classes, Sardar raised a question to one of the young initiates, pointing at a banana leaf to tell him what it was. The young comrade replied, that it is a banana leaf. Sardar raised his voice, and asked once again, what it was. This time the young comrade, stuttered in his reply, and said, it is a banana leaf, or may be it is not. Sardar now pointed to his uncertainty and stressed the ambiguity that underlay his answer, to finally point out the crisis of faith in oneself, which is the last thing a Communist should fall prey to. This is in itself a good example, one that contrasts, the subjunctive and indicative moods that we earlier discussed. The fact that, there was a crisis is pointed out by Sardar himself, and this adds to Turner’s hypothesis on the social drama, that it begins with a crisis followed by a breach of the existing peace. Such elements that point to the dynamics of a social drama were

scattered at many a point in the narratives. Now, we continue with Asokan's narration of the incident.

Following the class, held under cover of darkness, the comrades were dispersing and returning to their respective homes or shelters. They moved scattered along the paddy fields, but in concert. On the way, they saw a group of people approaching them, this startled them. Asokan remembered that no one knew what to do, for every one feared the police who came on regular night beats to look for the Communists. Sardar's firm and loud voice rose again asking the group approaching, who they were. They replied, they were locals who were looking for a calf that was missing from the herd. Everyone heaved a sigh of relief, remembered Asokan.

The realm of uncertainty or the mood of the subjunctive was overwhelmingly fearful and threatening as resonates in the account of Asokan. The underground movement of the Communists following the adoption of the Calcutta Thesis was a fatalistic drama, as many look back on it in retrospect. Its positive historicity having been contained by the institutionalization of the CPI, within the Parliamentary Democracy of India following the Palghat Congress in 1955, it was the subjunctive elements of the movement that were left for the imagination of the people to play with. In the intensity of grief shared in the loss of lives of many like Sardar they gave it dramatic dimensions.

But the distinctive play of power between the different actors adds to this drama. The time and space within this universe that creates the syntax of power that connects the opposites of life and death, is specified within the perimeters of the taboo of untouchability. The taboo is one that has already transformed human beings into signifieds of language by treating them as

objects open to touch and not open to touch (Jaaware:1998). The body is transformed into the site of power split between the contestations of touchability and untouchability. The most elementary unit of this discourse of mourning or this social drama, was the human body itself. The power of this signification was challenged through a breach that the Communists had made. They little knew the end of it as players in the drama. But all their bodies were open to severe challenge in terms of extermination from the agency of nemesis that held the rock bottom of this signification binding it into a totality, the agency of the state. The abrogation of the discourse and its redressal made by the Communists became possible only through a sacrifice.

The sacrifice of Sardar emerged as a sign of redressal when the dominant world of signification was flung open to reveal its deep seated prejudices. Sardar as a powerful actor in an act of self-sacrifice, assumed the role of the victim for the sacrifice. His body became the site of the bitter contestation of power between the subversive discourse of the communists and the dominating discourse of the state. In a short story written in memory of Sardar, D.M.Pottekkattu, acclaimed writer and theater personality in Malayalam, writes, “He was not an individual. He was a movement. When *maashu* (master) moved through the streets, it was like a thousand masters on the move. There was something about him that lay beyond all desires. Seeing him on the move, was something that more than fulfilled the eyes, ears, all the senses. It really was more than fulfilling, that one never had enough of it. Yes; his body represented the brightness of the new and exuded the uninterrupted flow of a rebellion” puthumayude prakaasavum, porveeryathinte pravahavum poleyulla oru deham. These words, when translated, celebrate his body as the challenge to the order of power. This

way of its representation in his death, i.e., his martyrdom or his sacrifice gives it the dramatic effect, which effect is one of its hallmarks.

The intensity of the social and political transformation triggered by Indian Independence came to its summit on the eve of the First Republic Day of India, when the Communists of Nattika firka decided to protest against police brutality in the firka and make a statement for Citizens' Rights. The moment when he was chosen to lead the Rally for Citizens' Rights, Sardar perceived the choice as fatal. An informant Chandru states that, one day before the rally, he came to take leave of his eldest brother, who for him represented his family. Sardar disclosed to his brother, how inevitable it was for him to lead the Rally on the Republic Day. There was no useful counsel that Kumaran, Sardar's eldest brother, could offer him. Virtually, from that moment on, for everyone around him, his family, his friends and his comrades, he was being drawn into the realm of the mythical or the ideal or the realm of gods. It was left to the machinery of the State, now to complete the sacrificial process, and seek redressal for the realm of power from the chaos thrust on it, by the challenge thrown by the Communists from the underground. His ordinary quotidian life as a school teacher and a social-political activist had ceased to be. This momentary essence of his Self (that of the sacrificial victim) as he was later mourned with its aura of mythicity, carried into the realm of collective social imagination, the moment the state took Sardar's life. The 'rite of passage' from the colonial yoke to the world of Sovereignty, thus was achieved for the firka through the sacrifice of Sardar. It was not done to avert any danger; a social or natural calamity, which is usually the case in collective sacrifices, according to Evans-Pritchard (1956:198). Yet, it was a collective sacrifice, because the entire Firka mourned his death consciously or unconsciously as such since the beginning. In the years that followed, the

mourning assumed ever more its collective character. The martyrdom commemorations had turned into a peculiar rite, to appease the spirit of the departed victim. There were not to be any more bloody sacrifices. In its integral association with the political ideology of the Left, the 'rite of passage' attained consummation; its ritual Sovereignty. It is towards ascertaining this identity, that the firka hosts the martyrdom commemorations, every year.

On the other hand, in the 'social drama' of transformation, his death also became the sacrificial moment of redressal of the breach made by the Communists to the peace in the Firka. The institutionalization of a different order of symbols in the form of *aikyakeralam* or Unified Kerala in transgressive space opened by the underground movement in the ritualistic demarcation of the public space into the signifiers of untouchable and touchable marked its reentry into the historic order of narratives.

CHAPTER 2

THE MORPHOLOGY OF MARTYRDOM/SACRIFICE

As observed in the Introduction this book is about representations of mourning. In this chapter what I intend to do is to bring the representations closer to the historic social formations of the firka and observe them in the light of the anthropological evidence embedded in mourning the death of sardar. I have titled this chapter a morphology following Marcel Mauss (1979:7-8) to mean an analysis of a fact (i.e.martyrdom or/and sacrifice) in the light of the social formations that define the fact through their specific acts of representation. With respect to a metaphysical idea like death, in order to understand how it is transformed into a fact, needless to say, a symbolic approach has been followed here rather than trying to do a quantitative study as is often assumed with morphology.

The morphological categories under consideration may be summarized as follows.

1. Martyrdom or the laying down of life for a cause one believes to be true and later retold through stories of praise and hagiographies of the martyr. The cause of the martyr is re-appraised in collective imagination.
2. Sacrifice or the taking of a life that is offered as an oblation or offering to the Gods. The victim that is sacrificed is later venerated and worshiped as an embodiment of exchange between the sacred and the profane the immortals and the mortals. The belief of the victim is shared with the rest.
3. A political community which mourns it as a martyrdom and his death to be self-willed. Represses the possibility of a sacrificial scheme involving a victim and glorifies the memory of the martyr with a sense of guilt,

marking the commemoration of the martyrdom as an expiatory rite for the martyr.

4. An ethnic community which mourns it as a sacrifice. It appears anxious to disclose the truth that the martyrdom was actually a betrayal of truth. The martyr was a victim of the secretly contrived circumstances and invited his own death as a nemesis.

It is within the space of these four concepts that the mourning of sardar's death as a sacrifice and/or martyrdom earns its right to democratic discourse. They co-exist with other forms of representations in the space of death. It was Robert Hertz (1960), who first attempted the study of death as a 'total social phenomenon' (Kopping,1999:39). Hertz but followed the classificatory scheme propounded by the early structuralists (Durkheim and Mauss(1970)) and equated death with the left side of the body. The two categories – political and ethnic community – have been approached by keeping the Left parties and the Ezhava caste in focus who together occupy the space of death in these representations. Though the martyr columns, a road and a party office of the CPI named after sardar memorialize him daily it is the anniversary processions and rallies that give it a ritualistic effect. This is also related to certain aspects of the Ezhava rituals prevalent in the Firka of which now I shall in detail explain with those of Edathiruthy as its focus.

Ethnic Community

It is the beginning of the system of modern school education instituted by the British in Malabar that led the way to a self-conceptualization amongst the ezhava as of an ethnic community. In the 1930s the newly educated youngsters received allowances from Madras district government to set up

independent schools. This helped create an awakening to the benefits of a communitarian organization of equals. The initiative for construction of temples, triggered by the spread of the ideals of the spiritual reformer Sree Narayana Guru, got an additional boost because of this. Menon (1994:68) has pointed out how the tiyya discarded many of their ancient worship rites involving the sacrificial offerings of toddy (coconut palm liquor) and chicken-cock sacrifices in their efforts to rise in ritual hierarchy amongst the Hindus, even in parts of Kerala where the teachings of guru were not influential for example in North Kerala. Aiyappan (1965:175) has shown how, many of these rituals were even sought to be replaced by other rituals resembling those of the higher castes and how in certain other instances some of the rituals were totally abandoned with for economic reasons.

Speaking of the Ezhava of the Firka, these observations assume importance in the light of the reiteration of the myths of their origin as the founding legend of their temples. In every family treated here as a clan or kinsgroup within the caste, there was a deep rooted faith in ancestral worship. Sometimes these were legends about origin from a high caste Nambuthiri who migrated from elsewhere. Such legends got wider prevalence for they reaffirmed purity of birth whereas the more ancient cults of Bhagavathy and Muthappan, representing the so-called Sakta tradition of Kerala which has strong tantric elements, also widely prevalent amongst the Ezhava, came to be gradually ignored.

But it is also the case that some of the contiguous families, instead of claims to purity of origin from a Nambuthiri, claimed common origin with other families. This denied marriage between the two families even though amongst the Ezhava there is no taboo against intermarriage amongst contiguous families. This symbiosis is an interesting aspect and assumes ritual forms,

when for example, during the time of ancestral puja, a combination of the urine, dung, milk, curd and ghee (*panchagavya*) offered to the ancestral deity, has to be brought from the houses of the other family. This for example is the relation between the Kumbalaparambil and Kollarayil families in the village, Edathiruthy.

To illustrate this process of cultural symbiosis between two families better, the role of a ritual performer *inangan* also beckons consideration. It is a vanishing and almost extinct practice – that of the *inangan* - who was the ritual attendant to every member of a household of every particular family of the ezhava in ceremonies, especially marriage and death but who had to be from a family different from one's own. *Inangan* could not be from just any family other than one's own. He had to be from such a family with which a prohibition of marriage was also observed⁷.

In more recent times by contrast such symbiosis is negatively marked by an incident following the divorce of a couple who “dared” to marry crossing the boundaries of incest. The divorce could be projected as an instance of penalization for disregard of conventions in this case. The moralistic allusions point out that in the whole process it is the transformation of the socio-political scenario that takes the leading role in redefining these traditions and the identity (ies) of its family members and if not in the form of a purity of origin then in terms of purity of blood the founding myths of the families came to be emphasized.

⁷ This is a topic that requires greater field-work and more detailed analysis. Although restricted to the village of Edathiruthy it is a hypothesis that demands more extensive verification. The Ezhava castes of the firka are mostly integrated through what in the words of Morton Klass (1993) may be called 'marriage groups', i.e sub-caste like formations within the castes that regulate the functioning of the caste as a whole, as a group by normalizing alliance patterns by excommunicating the dissenters. Though such structures are on the wane, and alliances are being solicited from a region much larger than the firka now, its presence can be ignored only at peril because for the poorer household of the community it still defines the rule. I do not have the sufficient data to support this which is the reason I mentioned that it calls for greater field-work.

The concept of an ethnic oneness was also strengthened by the incest taboo existing between the different lineages (*tavazhi*) within individual families. Therefore the sacredness of the *kudiyirippu* or the ancestral piece of land where-from the different lineages diversified was also reasserted. There a female idol, one of a mother deity usually called *bhagavathy*, was worshipped. The ancestral deity called *muthappan* also found a place here.

The emergence, in the wake of social reform spearheaded by spread of education and schools, of contenting traditions regarding the nature of worship to be followed at the *kudiyirippu* plot within the lineages of ezhava families led to the building of new temples by the lineages. But not often were they successful and at times have led to tragic outcomes with the abandoning of the temple, allegedly leading to severe cases of insanity and suicide among the members of the households in the lineages. Often such developments sent back particular lineages to their original place of worship viz. *kudiyirippu*. On the whole it may be said that the building of new temples did much less to reassert the impulse on the ezhava to rise in ritual status than to indicate the much strenuous task that lay ahead of them in defining their own sacred spaces in the changing scenario of society.

This contestation for sacredness paved the way for the ezhava to feel themselves as one ethnic community. But at the same time it also paved the way for the inception of a host of new ideas that made their entry in the form of nationalism. It was felt initially in the form of reform which meant change in ritual practices. The experience gathered from participation in social and national struggles also aided the transformation of the ezhava into one social group rooted in ethnic oneness built on a contestation for sacredness⁸.

⁸ As Sudipta Kaviraj (1993: 1-39) tells us the ideas of nationalism has always arrived with their specific rendition in traditional idioms.

The migratory fact ascribed to the nambuthiri myth of origin especially highlights this point⁹. This meant that the place of the origin of a family as such lay elsewhere and the story of its true ancestors also lives elsewhere. There is often an ascription to the north but the exact point of origin is seldom precise¹⁰. This meant also that for the ezhava, their identity lay no longer fixed to the milieu of their own conclaves of worship. The mourning of the death of sardar as that of a totemic ancestor made way for the creation of an alternate milieu of sacredness in the midst of developments related to nationalism. The identity of a victim the loss of life of who could be shared amongst the members of the caste just like that of a sacrificial victim during a ritualistic communion helped this representation¹¹.

For the Ezhava therefore Communism as an ideology donned the role of a new faith in the symbolic resurrection of Sardar not as a martyr but as a victim. In this form it also acquired an ascriptive role for the members of the caste after monuments like a junction named after Sardar's family, a road built in his name and pillars made in his memory. As a death partaken of like a sacrifice it marked for the caste, a threshold in entering the new spaces earmarked by its sacredness. In a similar rite of passage names including Sardar, Mashu (master), Sakhavu (comrade) etc became honorifics for the members of the caste. All these developments, as much as it helped a feeling of ethnic oneness amongst ezhava to grow, led to the growth of the communist movement in the firka.

⁹ According to it the *nambuthiri* after falling in love with a lower caste women had to decide to leave his *mana* and along with her travelled to the village(s) where his descendants eventually formed particular families.

¹⁰ It was only amongst a few select rich households of any clan that held through their economic status a natural claim to knowledge of these details divined to them by astrologers any mention as to specific place names were identified.

¹¹ These mythical variations in self-identity here may be also seen as espousals of distinct forms of historical consciousness arising from shifting circumstances, a phenomenon observed amongst the Syrian Christians of Kerala, according to Susan Visvanathan(1993:13-69).

It gradually took root as part of an ongoing historic process begun with the social and national movements. That the anniversary of Sardar's death would be commemorated also ensured a form of ritualistic continuity to this historic process notwithstanding the several divisions within the communist movement itself.

The Political Community

If the ethnic community structured the general economy¹² of the representation of death as sacrifice, the political community did the same for martyrdom. All factions of the Left including the so-called conservative and radical formations of it apportion the image of the martyr as a hero in their public speeches and demonstrations. This seemingly secular sphere of articulation but thrives on its theatrical possibilities of narrativity accorded in the forms of violence, cruelty and pain that marked the death of the martyr in a confrontation with the police on the fateful day of January 26th of 1950.

To begin with it will be useful to look at the political formations that present him as a martyr. These are primarily the political parties of which the CPI was the beginner. But since 1964, following splits in the CPI, the situation has become more complex. As of today this community is represented in the three different groups of the Left of which the Communist Party of India has named their local committee office at Edamuttom *Sardar Mandiram* and has built a Martyr's Pillar in Edathiruthy. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) has consistently brought out memoirs in the pages of its organ, the popular daily called *Desabhimani*, on every 26th of January. The Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) has organized rallies and meetings separate from the the rest two on the anniversary of his death. The latter a radical

¹² A concept used in Bataille (1991; 93) to describe the world of ritual expenditure.

wing of the Communists that was formed following the Naxalbari uprisings in West Bengal found a promising resonance in the village. For them Sardar became an embodiment of Maoist militancy as well. As for the CPI and the CPI (M), they also took out separate rallies on the day of martyrdom whenever they were in opposite camps of electoral alliance and joint rallies when they were part of the United Front (1967-69) or the Left Democratic Front (1972-----)¹³.

A sum total of these representations helps every party to secretly share amongst themselves a sacred responsibility of fulfilling the aims of the communist movement, thus binding them together as one political community. The shared feeling of secrecy is primarily due to the unfulfilment of the revolutionary theses of 1948 and its beckoning questions which remain unanswered. The largely perceived reality of the loss of this cause was difficult to bury and hence along with the memorial column and commemoration rites for Sardar, it transformed itself into spectral visions. As such they reflected through the banners of the different political formations the death of sardar. But it did not stop there. Through such

¹³ The first serious rupture in the Communist movement took place in the year 1964 following the war with China when one faction of the Party took the strong view that a 'socialist state cannot make an act of aggression'. This coupled with the allegations of espionage for the British during the under-trial days of the Meerut Conspiracy Case 1928 against the then Secretary of the CPI S.A.Dange held the centre stage of issues leading to the split in 1964. In the State Legislative Assembly elections of 1965 in Kerala the CPI (M) came to the fore front. It defeated the ruling alliance at the Centre of which the CPI formed a part along with the Congress (I). In 1967 the CPI and the CPI (M) re-united again and along with five other parties formed an electoral alliance called the United Front that remained in office upon winning the Assembly elections from 1967-69. In 1969 the CPI expressed dissidence within the Front and consequently the UF Ministry headed by EMS Nambudirippadu fell following the carrying of a no-confidence motion against his ministry in the Assembly. This formed the backdrop for the second split between the CPI and the CPI (M) that had come together only for electoral alliances and not on the basis of a common party programme. From 1969-79 the CPI ruled in alliance with Congress and other parties with C. Achutha Menon as the Chief Minister for the most part succeeded by the Congressmen K.Karunakaran and A.K.Antony following the Assembly elections in 1977. It was in the Assembly elections of 1980 that the two Communist Parties-CPI &CPI(M) decided to join hands and form a Left Democratic Front, fought the elections, won; but, stayed in power only till 1982. The electoral alliance has remained intact ever since.

visions, they sought to embody the cruelty and pain experienced in the depth of its (i.e. of his death) tragedy, evoking the spirit of Sardar as a critical witness to the ideological tasks that lay ahead of them. On certain occasions it reprised events of transgression in its wake which threw light back on the political community of their historic presence vis-a-vis the state and the trail of events that led to the death of Sardar.

The following incident took place when a state of internal emergency was declared in the state by the then government ruling the centre headed by Indira Gandhi. It was purportedly a warning to one of the Left parties against its breach of promise to hold a rally despite a ban on it. It was also a protest to the attempt of any single party of the Left to appropriate for itself the political legacy of Sardar. It happened in Chulur village in the year 1976.

A notice had been issued by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) announcing the holding of martyrdom parade on the 26th of January a few days earlier. The political climate was not favourable that year because of the Emergency. Perhaps for the same reason there was no mention of the venue from where the parade would start or programmes be held. This had created a situation of unease amongst veterans one of whom recalled to me his doubts about the very possibility of holding the event. His suspicions were confirmed when he saw the CPI(M) party organ on the 26th morning which said that observation of the Sardar Dinam was cancelled for that year.

Sympathizers of the movement were upset with this decision taken by the CPI (M). Ravi a resident of Chulur, a communist from a very young age and also someone who had seen sardar from close quarters through long association with him in the Party, was one of them. He was infuriated about the decision of the party for having no rhyme or reason to cancel the event.

Moreover what enraged him was the reversal of the initial decision. He felt the party was lying when it said that a rally will be held. He recalled that the fear of the Emergency was written all over the face of the notice and that the Party would blame the cancellation of the event on the adverse political climate.

Enraged by the notification cancelling the event, on the morning of January 26th he came to the flag post of the CPI (M) at the Pulichuvatu junction in the village and pulling down the party flag plucked the insignia of star on the flag leaving just the hammer and sickle behind, thus reinstating it into the form it was at the time when the party was undivided. Then he took out in a procession all by himself shouting the slogan *edathum valathum thulayatte, raktasaakshi jayikkathey*¹⁴.

People started joining him and they reached Edathiruthy, about a kilometer away and then the memorial for Sardar and planted the flag on its pillar. There Ravi spoke at length about the feelings he had about the way things were contrived with the connivance of the CPI (M) not to hold the event and douse the memory of a martyr who died fighting the authority of any agency to deprive him or for that matter anyone of their democratic rights in an independent country. His walk from Pulichuvatu to Edathiruthy and his speech transgressing the Emergency received great applause.

The same afternoon the secretary of the CPI (M) for the locality came in a car to the spot from where the party's flag was taken and crossed words with the veteran about the use of their flag, seeking to claim it back. Ravi retorted saying that the flag did not belong to anyone specific and belonged only to world working class movement and the Party had no rightful claim to it

¹⁴ "Down, down Left and Right, up up dear Martyr". The Left and the Right are the slang for the two Communist Parties, the CPI and the CPI(M) who were opposite camps then, the Right or the CPI supporting the Congress regime at the Centre and hence also the Emergency declaration and the Left or the CPI(M) opposing it both at the Centre and in the state.

especially when it was so outrageously betraying the principles of this movement by cancelling the Sardar Dinam. He was joined by a group of others, some of whom also being veterans chided the Party's secretary for having forgotten the scruples of the movement in complying with the strictures of a nondemocratic State. Kochupennu, another veteran of the Communists in the firka, came up to congratulate Ravi for the way he reacted to the situation and herself scolded the secretary for his impudence to claim the flag of the undivided working class movement as theirs. The party official was so dumbfounded in the spate of arguments that he had to return empty handed.

The desire for a space of democratic dissent and articulation though rare, can be argued to be an integral feature of these transgressions. But at the same time it is also a regular feature that it assumes a spectral logic (i.e. of a martyr speaking) in representing itself. In the year 2000, a group of volunteers were suspended from the local committee of the CPI (M) for disciplinary measures invoked against them in not supporting the official candidate of the party for the Panchayat elections of 1999 and instead fielding an alternate one. Although their candidate lost the elections they made Sardar Dinam an occasion to make the voice of their dissent clear.

They published a souvenir on Sardar and released it after a public meeting on that day. They interviewed different people, most of whom were veteran communists in the firka and collected several memoirs of Sardar from them. The souvenir also carried a photograph of Sardar in black and white whereas for all the years the different parties used almost identical hand drawn pictures of Sardar that accentuated his masculine features. The new yet old photograph showed a lot of authenticity and thus brought their own cause closer to its readers. Thus they tangentially pointed a criticism at the political community for having camouflaged a genuine portrayal of the martyr for all

these years thus trying to show how it had got weighed down within its own simulacrum of an identity with the martyr's images.

The souvenir also brought out a testimonial revelation in the form of a memoir about the first anniversary of Sardar's martyrdom. Written by Ravi (see above) this memoir titled *kathayillakatha* or a farce, recalled how he and Padmanabhan, a close friend and activist of the Party, risked their lives, on 26th January in 1951, to plant a red flag on the beach where Sardar was buried, despite a continuing ban on the Party. They succeeded in this and thus marked the memory of Sardar by yet another act of transgression. But instead of being congratulated they were to be later scolded by the Party seniors for having tried out things without any instructions from them. In later times, when the ban on the Party was lifted, notwithstanding the fact that it transformed into a historic moment for Communism in the firka, their pioneering observation of Sardar dinam was to mean merely a farce or *kathaayillakatha*. The memoir recalls the whole event within the sarcastic pun of a farce for the lack of respect with which the courage of the two friends was dismissed by the Party.

Through such rare events the representations grow in plurality revitalizing the spectrality of the political reality concealed within. The point here is that the formation of political community is often contingent and not conditioned by any other agency. It is formed neither through the agency of the state nor the civil society but through its transgressions such that it goes onto play a role in excess of the state or the civil society¹⁵. The events cited above go to show this unambiguously.

¹⁵ It is J.P.S.Uberoi (1996) who has arguably emphasized the unifying characteristic of martyrdom in that it united religion, civil society and the state in its representation of death. His study though based upon his observation of Sikhism and Islam cannot be held to be universally valid especially for lack of attention to the transgressions within which they are conceived.

To conclude this chapter, it has to be stated that the ritualistic continuity and enigmatic elusiveness of the mourning as martyrdom and sacrifice, point to the natural evolution of a symbolic world which from its inception defined its relation with the state or law as one of transgression and in turns has shown its possibility of marking the same through similar acts of transgression.

CHAPTER 3

A NOTE ON THE ECONOMY OF MOURNING

Land has traditionally formed the main source of income in the firka especially in the colonial times that one has to begin with the way its distribution was organized to get a glimpse of the firka economy. As for the current scenario pertaining to it, the search for a revenue map of the village, post -Land Reforms (1963) in the State of Kerala, left me stranded and in a very difficult situation. My inquiries at the Village Office of Edathiruthy where the land records are kept, taught me that a re-survey has not been done, even though following the Land Reforms Act, 1963, the State had taken unilateral possession of all land in the State, minus the forests and plantations in the Ghat ranges that were specifically mentioned in the Act. Every tenant was given the Right of possession to the piece of land where he/she had a settlement (*kudy*- the Right itself was called *kudykidappavakaasam*). Land Tribunals were set up centered around the Taluks to give the erstwhile tenants, title deeds to their respective plots of settlement. This meant the breaking up of the huge land- holdings that were under the possession of individual landlords. In the effort of the Tribunals working in tandem with the Village Offices at the basic level, a systematic reallocation was essential. In the absence of a total re-survey of land following the Reforms Act of 1963, the next best choice, in terms of a systematic map of land holdings in Kerala, came in the case of Edathiruthy village, (as is the case with every other village in the firka) from the 1905 survey done by the British dispensation of the erstwhile District of Malabar. This map bore the stamp of feudalism that the Land Reforms sought to erase. Dependence on the same map, for the redistribution of land, amongst the 1,881 house-holds (according to 1981 census), in the village proved an onerous task for the Village Officers, giving rise to many disputes about the drawing of the boundary lines on the map. If there were 214 landholders who split the area covered by the village on the

map into distinctive plots according to the 1905 survey; today, the same area is divided by overdrawing on the same map, amongst 1,881 land holders. The redrawing of the boundaries on the map left by the British dispensation according to the Village Office authorities gave rise to many a serious land dispute in the village. Generally, the state has followed three different ways for re-distributing the land amongst the tenants. The Revenue Department, accepted as valuable only three types of documents, with regard to the tenant's possession of his/her plot of land, after it declared itself the sole owner of all land in the State, through the Reform legislation. The latter basically meant the denial of any Right on the land to the erstwhile land-holders, mainly the janmis. These three types of documents were called, 1) Kraya certificate 2) Kudy Kidappu Avakaasam, and 3) Janmi's deed. The first certificate had to be directly obtained from the Land Tribunal, which after hearing the petitioner's claim to the land, decided whether he/she was to be duly awarded possession over the plot of land claimed in the petition. Such awards were final, and hence mostly undisputed and non-controversial¹⁶. The second was the tenant's right to the plot where he/she had set up her/his holding, which in the case of most of the peasants were part of a larger piece of land belonging to the landlord. This claim, extended to 7½ cents of land, which was also awarded to the petitioner upon his approaching the Tribunal and following its decision, that the land may be given¹⁷. The third was the land given by the landlord (janmi) to the tenant. The tenant's due claim according to the Reforms Act, did not exceed 2 ½ cents and it was left to the discretion of the landlord, to choose how much land and where in his holding was such land to be given. The tenant had to pay a price for this, as well,

¹⁶ Known as tenancy reforms, such awards secured the possession of 36.5% of the net sown area by 1.3 million house-holds (Leiten, EPW, Apr20-26, 2002).

¹⁷ Also mostly a success, the *kudykidappavakaasam* was distributed to 2,75,000 of the 4,50,000 applications received (Leiten, op.cit.).

although in instalments¹⁸. According to the Village Officer, this was the troublemaker, which gave rise to many a land dispute in the village. In the dissection of his own plot of land, the landlord, apparently followed little of the correspondence to the survey- numbers of the plots of land, as given according to the Survey Map of 1905. According to the Village Officer, this led to overlapping of lands under the possession of different tenants and led to bickering over land in the village. To put it short, it was the colonial mapping of the land, that enjoyed hegemony. This led to the creation of many a social dispute. In resorting to the antiquated colonial records (tailored to the needs of a zamindari system of land adjudication), for the redistribution of land, the Village Officer vouches there are many possibilities for the rising of a land dispute¹⁹. The reason why we deal with this problem at such length, is that there is a crisis of identity stemming from a location of the entity called Nattika firka in the colonial mapping of the place. This crisis of identity is also one of the emotional pillars for all parties of the Left, in mourning the death of Sardar as martyrdom, even today.

¹⁸ The gross failure in the implementation of the Reforms. Amount of land re-distributed came to a mere 1% of the net sown area (Leiten, op.cit).

¹⁹ T.K.Oommen (1985) has pointed out citing Herring (1980) that, in the land reforms of Kerala, "the conceptualization was explicitly anti-feudal and pro-capitalist" (Oommen, 1985:209). Pointing out one of the serious discrepancies in the implementation of the Act, Oommen says, the reforms were achieved through conferring ownership rights on the peasants rather than through an actual re-distribution of the excess land acquired through the operationalization of ceiling on the extent of land-holdings (ibid:212). The reforms that were enforced in two stages of legislation (the Reforms Act of 1963 and the Amendment Act of 1969) gave in the interval between the two legislation, enough time for the landlords to manipulate the new laws to their advantage. They took advantage mainly of the fact that the ceiling did not hold for plantations. Therefore many landlords changed their agricultural plots to plantations. Oommen suggests that this change in the nature of the plots led to the baffling increase in the account of the forest land in the state by 1,60,000 hectares between 1961 and '68 (ibid:212). Many land owners even managed to sell off large amounts of surplus land in the meanwhile. Efforts to enlist local participation in the process of land re-distribution by forming popular committees at the grassroots' level also did not succeed in the end robbing the peasant movement in Kerala of its 'vitality' (ibid:217). This because it managed to only institutionalize and not mobilize the peasant participation at the grassroots' level. According to him, a survey of the reforms instituted by the state government in 1966-67 also did not bear the desired results because it failed to arrive at the root questions of distribution by focussing its attention on the number of cases lodged with the Land Tribunals for claims of land by the peasants (ibid:214).

According to Ravi (see above) the landscape of the village when this map was drawn was entirely different from what it is today. Earlier the periodic floods inundated the paddy fields every year. The months of rain from June to August were months of misery for the peasants. But, it was also a time for ferrying goods by boat to otherwise inaccessible locales of the village. The picture that emerged from the accounts of various other respondents was also mostly similar, of a land that is covered by paddy fields for the most part and traversed only by small foot paths hedging the fields at most of the places. The rains made the paddy fields a virtual high way, for people to ship goods like granite and wood for purposes like construction of a house, a shop etc. It was on this ritualistic map; conditioned according to the rhythm of the seasons and its changes, that the colonial regime's survey map was imposed for the redistribution of land, in the year 1905.

The reason for highlighting this fact is also to show that, in respect of the mourning it is the colonial mapping of the space that takes pre-eminence. The spatial ordering of the village in mourning winds back in time and signifies places with names drawn from the colonial days. The very association with Nattika firka is a primary instance of this. It serves a mnemonic function as opposed to the way it was originally identified; i.e., as a revenue unit. Most place names in the village still retain their feudal and pre-colonial inheritance, as well²⁰.

²⁰ The northern tip of the village is now, as it was then, called *munayatte nilam* meaning the land at the tip. The cutting of the Connolly Canal in the 1850s made it into an island which was totally under the Trustee of a temple in the neighbouring state of Cochin. Now, its ownership has changed and the plot is divided amongst various owners, connected to the mainland by a bridge called *koonan paalam* or the hump-back bridge, that true to its name, has the shape of a hump back kneeling on his fours across the river as a conveyor belt for the people. The bridge, though dilapidated stands even today and still, is the only connection with the main land. It is interesting to note how the description of human shapes blended with the names of places. *Daivem Thazhathe Nilam* is another example. This is the plot in the village where during the annual festival in the region the reigning deity of the temple at Triprayar, in the last phase of the festival alighted on an elephant- top, which is caparisoned and taken through all the lands over which the temple had trusteeship. The ritual follows even today, the place retains the name also even today, though the revenue and ownership of the plot has changed hands.

This ordering of space is the ritualistic ordering of space, and hence indicate the passage from colonialism to sovereignty as well as pre-statehood to statehood. It is in relating to the political map of the nation as a Republic, that we arrive at this terrain that is criss-crossed by trips of nostalgia, and hence evoking place names simultaneously pertaining to pre-colonial, colonial, post-colonial; and also pre-State-hood and post State-hood days. This multiplicity in addressing a place by a name probably is the reason why there are so many land disputes pending with the Land Tribunals and the Civil Courts of Kerala today. A comprehensive re-survey of the land in accordance with the re-distribution that has followed the Land Reforms may be one way out of it. Anyway, our concern with the place names go only insofar as the place called Nattika firka still retains its colonial; pre-Statehood, identity; an identity announcing a rite of passage from an economy of the region to an economy of the nation through the mourning of Sardar's death.

The economy of ritual space opened up through the mourning continued to live in the commemoration or expiation that arose from it. The way it stands today, it provides the general clue for understanding certain aspects of the political economy of Nattika firka with the village of Edathiruthy in focus, thus endorsing the hypothesis of Georges Bataille, who advanced the concepts of restricted economy and general economy in social criticism.

Georges Bataille's fundamental proposition turns on the distinction that he makes between general economy and restricted economy. Restricted economy by its own endemic design eludes the category of ritual. Restricted economy is bound by strictly utilitarian ends and any means of non-profitable expenditure is alien to the notions implicit to its perspective. The general economy on the other hand looks at the economic processes of life

from the perspective of the imperative of non-profitable expenditure without which life cannot sustain itself. For instance as Bataille writes, “The very principle of living matter requires that the chemical operations of life, which demand an expenditure of energy, be gainful, productive of surpluses” (Bataille, 1991: 27). The surplus can only pave the way for growth that manifests itself in different life forms. The idea of growth is distinct from the idea of accumulation that an advocate of restricted economy may subscribe to. With respect to human beings as distinct from animals the phenomenon of growth leads to a multiplicity of life forms, that Bataille says, “there is generally no growth but only a luxurious squandering of energy in every form! The history of life on earth is mainly the effect of a wild exuberance; the dominant event is the development of luxury, the production of increasingly burdensome ways of life” (ibid:33). The ritual of sacrifice is one form of this growth. It is burdensome, yet luxurious, exuberant and overflowing with excess of energy. The sacrificial victim is the medium through which this energy is expended, destroyed in fact, so that the society shall endure and not turn itself into a collective hubris, that in its conceitedness augmented by the accumulated products of nature transmogrify an act of sacrifice into a declaration of war.

The act of sacrifice gives ritual its value in its intransigent refusal of utilitarian ends for the community/person as drawn by Bataille from the study of sacrifices of the Aztecs (ibid:45-61). Sardar’s death as seen through its mourning by the firka assumes the same characteristic, by which a human life is taken out of the profane circle of exchange and offered as a gift to the sacred order of things. In making this prestation, the community of mourners attain a sovereignty separate from and despite the state. This is because an act of gift involves an assumption of sovereignty (ibid:64). Bataille substantiates

his propositions with Mauss' observations (1970) of the potlatches among the Indians of American Northwest. Bataille, makes the theses of Mauss his basis for a critique of the capitalist economy. Thus in the act of profitless consumption as in sacrifice or the exuberant dispossession of wealth as in gift, what he finds interesting is the modes of economic behaviour that revolt against the accumulative ways of capitalist expansion and wealth. He writes, "Beyond a military exploitation, a religious mystification and a capitalist misappropriation, henceforth no one can rediscover the meaning of wealth, the explosiveness that it heralds, unless it is in the splendor of rags and the somber challenge of indifference. One might say, finally, that the lie destines life's exuberance to revolt" (ibid:77).

In the general economy of mourning the 'splendor of rags and the somber challenge of indifference' shows itself as exuberance in mourning the Republic Day of India²¹ as a sacrifice. Such forms of mourning though are contingent in its existence. By contingent I mean that this perspective opens up suddenly and without anticipation. For example, it may be communicated through the tears of an old woman who knew Sardar, or a silence that follows the mention of his name between two old friends who knew Sardar.

The rituals of commemoration as such may be tailored to suit the needs and interests of specific political formations in their effort to win legitimacy in the firka. It is contingency in occurrence that determines the universal prevalence of mourning and not the staging of the commemoration as such. The commemoration through its concrete presence, nonetheless offers the opportunity to discern such mourning as a fact.

²¹ See also Introduction, where we have already discussed the role of the lie in the act of proclaiming the Republic, seen through the prism of the ritual.

The commemorations highlight martyrdom as an act of sacrifice, as a ‘gift of death’²², that stands as central to the idea of sovereignty. In Natika firka, the 26th of January cannot pass without correlating in the image of the sacrificial victim the ideals of sovereignty and sacrifice in inextricable a manner. The ritual commemorating the martyrdom of Sardar thus is not merely a ritual of mourning, but one of sovereignty as well. Thus donning the role of a surplus that is conventionally offered to the Gods, the firka on every year 26th of January, represents the spirit of the victim as the ‘accursed share’; a political surplus that is offered to enrich the idea of sovereignty, transgressing the accumulated share of a state that gratuitously avers any claims to sovereignty as merely its own.

With the formation of the state of Kerala, and the coming to power of the first Communist Government in the state, there was a strengthening in the observation of his martyrdom. This was achieved through linking his martyrdom with the formation of a distinct nationality within the Union *aikyakeralam*, and the struggle of the CPI towards that cause. Further, when the Government finally passed the Land Reforms Act in 1963, it became an even greater matter for the celebration of the Communists. Many interpreted it as the realization of the dreams of the Communist during the days of the Underground politics of 1948-52, when comrades like Sardar lost their lives.

Studying the mourning in the light of general economy does help us to come to certain of the following conclusions. The very necessity of its commemoration as a ritual is explained in terms of prosperity. It is the share that cannot be consumed; because it is accursed.

²² See chapter 2, the section on the ‘multiple partaking of the martyrdom’.

At the same time, in order to see whose prosperity does it represent, it is also pertinent to see how the scenario of land holdings and revenue accruing from it has changed over the years. The more equitable forms of distribution championed by the Left have reduced the 'burden of luxury on which life is built' as the state of the lower castes (mostly ezhava) and their relation to the system of landholdings reveal.

To illustrate this one needs to look at the transition in the economic scenario that has come about in the village over the past hundred years. This subject has to be treated with the attention it deserves. For instance, let us take the question of land redistribution. According to the 1901 census, the *Desam* (the lowest revenue unit) of Edathiruthy had a population of 3183. The land settlements of 1905 show 214 from this number to be landholders. This meant that only less than 10% had rights or titles to land. The rest were tenants. Of the 214 land holders in the village,

40 paid patta of Re.1 and less

130 paid patta of Rs.10 and less, but over Re.1

26 paid patta of Rs.30 and less, but over Rs.10

8 paid patta of Rs.50 and less, but over Rs.30

5 paid patta of Rs.100 and less, but over Rs.50

3 paid patta of Rs.250 and less, but over Rs.100

1 paid patta of Rs.500 and less, but over Rs.250

1 paid patta-exceeding Rs.1000 (RS.1055)

Of the entire cultivated land of 1366 acres, 331 acres and 41 cents were under the possession of one landlord²³. Another had possession of 74 acres and 54 cents. This scenario remained more or less the same, even through

²³ This overwhelming concentration of land in the hands of one landlord as a general feature of feudalism in Malabar has been recorded by Panikkar(1989:25-27), which led to a high concentration of power, in his hands, the implications of which surfaced drastically for the village of Edathiruthy during the time of the underground challenge by the Communists.

the resettlement of 1935, to the period of time that witnessed the communist uprisings, i.e. 1940s.

This scenario underwent a radical change with the Kerala Land Reforms Act, 1963. Following the Act the Government was declared the owner of all land in the state. The purport of the legislation was to redistribute the land in such a way that the zamindari system was abolished and the dependents of the landlords and other landless peasants got an equitable share of the land. This legislation wrought changes in the relations of land -ownership all over the state and the firka of Nattika was no exception. For example, if according to the 1891 census, amongst the thousand plus resident population of Edathiruthy village only a small fraction (a little above two hundred) owned any property in the form of land, now, from a population of ten thousand plus residents (12641-Census, 1991), it would be hard to find more than a hundred who are actually landless.

Hovering about the phenomenon of mourning Sardar's death, this transformation in the pattern of land ownership reveals the milieu of a financial unburdening that has taken place for the ezhava more than any other caste in the village. Although representations of his death and its mourning are collectivized and ritualistic, the ezhava inhere this as the virtue or morale of Sardar's sacrifice. All factions of the Left- the CPI, CPI(M), the CPI (ML)- also pay their due respects to their comrade for having staked his life in the movement for achieving this transformation.

The same cannot be said to be true of the still lower castes of the pulaya and pariah. Their dwellings continue to be in the small land holdings at the fringes of fields and plantations from where the Reforms have not freed them. The middle cultivators mostly the Ezhava benefitted from the Reforms

more than anyone else. This was true of Edathiruthy as much as it was so for the entire state. For the still lower castes, continuing in the system of landholdings in a manner identical to the pre-Reform times meant that the mourning of Sardar's death evoked the ritualistic rise to dominance of the ezhava in the village hierarchy of caste. For them any mention of the name Sardar reflects prosperity, welfare, richness and sovereignty of an order that is distinctively marked from the digression of the accumulative rationality of a restricted economy but well encapsulated in the general economy of caste based ritualistic notion of expenditure of the ezhava. In their mourning for Sardar it is taken to be understood how the prosperity of the Ezhava came to be. They mourn his death no less than any other caste in the village and in their representation of the events or happenings of a time, the general economy of the sacrificial death of Sardar forms the mythical binding force, like the sacrifice of a God.

CHAPTER 4

CASTE AND TOTEMIC CATEGORIES AMONGST THE EZHAVA

In this chapter I will pursue some of the themes already opened up for our discussion in a previous chapter on the formation of an ethnic community situated around the representations-in-mourning of Sardar as a victim. For a better understanding of the same here I explore deeper into the totemic-symbolic world of Ezhava families in the Firka vis-a-vis the traditional order of the caste system in which it existed.

In order to understand the totems amongst a caste it is essential to follow the specific genealogies of space and time that every caste has situated itself in, in addition to the finer genealogy of the family totem within the caste. Were it not for the umpteen totems divided in terms of occupation, objects, places, divinities and its own deities and places of worship, no caste would form itself into a group of exchange be it women or be it food. Therefore there is no totem without caste as much as there is no caste without totems. Thus Kaarayil, Kollarayil, Ponathil, Kumbalaparambil, Velaparambil (different kinship or alliance groups amongst the Ezhavas in the village of Edathiruthy) are all different totem names *veettu peru* within the singular caste (Ezhava), which all practice strict exogamy (marriage is allowed between different families inside a caste) and simultaneously strict endogamy (marriage not allowed outside of the caste). Amongst themselves they fall into such diverse groups as Thandar, Panicker, Kuruppan, Choan all of which observe functional specialization and as a consequence of that, strict endogamy (intermarriage between these groups are prohibited).

Further, within a single family, there are also further divisions marking each family into sub-groups of lineages (*tavazhi*). The lineages, though they do

not pertain to any functional or alliance systems, do make subtle, but strong distinctions relating to places of habit. So we have a universe that is criss-crossed in many sub universes that are at once totemic, casteist and lineage-based. Of these the lineage based classification formed the most elementary level and these names were never used for the making of public deeds or contracts and were largely shared or used only amidst the members of any single family.

This was not merely a case with the Ezhava caste. Going by the revenue records of the Land Survey, 1905, we find that, almost every other community or caste had a similar characterization of their social universe-one that is criss-crossed by many divisions. Some of the names gathered from the Land Survey records of 1905, allude to this possibility. The four most important of these divisions according to the criterion followed in addressing the pattadar's names are of 1)caste, 2) descent-patrilineal or matrilineal 3) profession and 4) family names.

The name of a particular plot of land, identified in the survey-map, according to a specific survey number, is identified, in the locality by its name like Thozhthum Parambu (the plot called thozhuthu), or Kaala Parambu (plot called kaala) or Kadaavanadu nilam (the plot called kadavanadu). There are no specific connections, between the name of a plot and the name of its pattadar. Nor is there a totemistic conjunction of the plot's name, with the family name of the pattadar.

Still, most landowners in the village had pieces of land named after their totem name. In many a case, a specific ancestral plot of land, was identified with the name of their family, which may also be considered its totem name. The totem or *veetu peru* here coincides with the place of habit, besides

signifying other aspects. For the land-owning families, the ancestral plot is identified as the Kudiyirippu²⁴.

In this regard, it – the plot of land- resembles cattle herd amongst the Nuer. If, the Nuer conceive of the ancestor of a clan as having possessed a herd, the clans of the land-owning communities in the village, conceive of their ancestors as having possessed a particular piece of land. Through exchange by sale or by alliance through marriage, the same plot of land may have changed hands, but they still retain their specific identity through its name. This is so with the Nuer too, wherein the clan is thought of as originating from a herd, that the ancestor possessed which even though dispersed in many clans, still retain the sense of collectivity (Evans-Pritchard: 1956:258).

The families which have legal titles to their ancestral plots transform them into groves where their family deities are worshipped. This was a special privilege that accrued only to land-owning groups, irrespective of caste or community differentiation. Access to such plots in the revenue map, accorded them a distinctive sense of pride and identity, which was denied to the lower caste landless peasants.

Apart from plots of land as ancestral property, named according to family names, several other criterion expressed themselves in the naming of plots of land. The instance of naming the land in fact, seems to be an innovative realm of native thinking in the village. There are land names that announce feudal institutions like *ooralan*, which had become extinct under the British regime. In some instances, the name of the plot was the totem of certain

²⁴ *Kudiyirippu* was found used in instances of other communities as well. For example, *Chennan Itty Kudiyirippu* that essentially means the land belonging to ther ancestor Chennan Itty. The land, though it takes its name from this person, did not belong to him. Such was the fusion that obtained with respect to the ownership of land in the year 1905, in the village of Edathiruthy. Any conclusion that helps to characterize this system of land title, and the classification of totems is a daunting task.

families. Kundukulam, Perinchery are both family names of Christians in the village and simultaneously, the names of certain plots of land. The name of the Collector of Malabar District, H.V. Connolly also has been given to certain plots as in Cheriya Connolly Parambu or Connolly Parambu. Not to mention that, the Connolly canal as such skirts the village on its Eastern border. There are lands named after artisans, like Aasarippady (the carpenter's gate) or Karuvaanpady (the blacksmith's gate). These plots of land retain their name even to this day, in the revenue records.

Some examples of the names of the land-holders are

1. Blahayil Kundunni Nair which splits like this, Blahayil (family name) Kundunny (name of the occupant) Nair (name of the caste).
2. Kunnathupadikkal Moidu vaidyar makan Mammathu, which splits like this, Kunnathupadikkal (family name) Moidu Vaidyar (Father's name) Mammathu (name of the pattadar).
3. Valiyakathu Kunjikkader makan Kunju Marikkar, which reads like this Valiyakathu (family name), Kunjikkader (Father's name), Kunju (Pattadar's name) Marikkar (name of a caste amongst Muslims, usually sea-farers by occupational specialization).
4. Kanjully Munnamthavazhi Karanavan Thachu Nair, which splits like, Kanjully (family name), Munnam thaavazhi kaaranavan (the family-elder (patriarch) of the third phratry of the family), Thachu (Name of the pattadar), Nair (caste-name).
5. Kanjully Ithiru Amma, which splits as follows, Kanjully (family name), Ithiru (name of the pattadar) Amma (the title of family elder- matriarch).
6. Arayamparambil Paru makan Raman, which goes like, Arayamparambil (family name) Paru (name of the mother) Raman (name of the pattadar).

7. Ayiroor Edamuttathu Kovilakathu Keralavarma Raajavu, which reads like Ayiroor (family name) Edamuttathu Kovilakam (name of a ruling house), Kerala (name of the pattadar) Varma (caste name) Raajavu (name of title-king).
8. Thachumparambil Porinchu makan Chathu, which splits like Thachumparambil (family name) Porinchu (father's name), Chathu (pattadar's name).
9. Nambiar Veettil Ikkavamma Makal Kunjikkavamma, which reads like Nambiarveettil (family name, here in a specific conjunction with caste name-Nambiar), Ikkavamma (Mother's name), Kunjikkavamma (pattadar's name, amma also signifying the matriarchial elderly title of the pattadar).

These four –family, nature of descent, caste and profession- are the main divisions in the society that emerge from the relations of ownership of land. At the same time, the name of a landless peasant Valluvankadu Ainikkadu Koran Chathan splits like this- Valluvankadu stands for the thara or the raised land set amidst fields where all the workers in the fields of the Blahayil family of Edathiruthy lived. Ainikkadu stands for the landlord family in the north where they were originally the dependents before being exchanged in dowry to the Blahayil house-hold in marriage, as dowry²⁵ and migrating to the south. Koran is the father's name and Chatthan, the name of the person.

Such was the scheme of classification of society amongst the various castes, based upon the ownership of land, which was mainly hereditary or ancestral. This classification, nonetheless, does not reveal the relations emergent from the management of land and its revenue. The management of land was so

²⁵ Information gathered from Sathish, himself a former resident of the valluvankadu *thara*.

distributed that the Adhikari of the village, who was also the highest revenue and judicial power recognized by the Government in the village, held the reins of power. This title for generations lay with the Blahayil Nairs. When a movement for re-distribution of land, began, (that found success in stages- Malabar Kudiyan Act, 1930 and The Kerala Land Reforms Act, 1963) it was targeted at the landed interests of mainly the big land- owners. This becomes evident from the trail the growth of national and social movements have taken in the village. The two major forces that opposed the growth of these movements, that at times took the form of movement against caste discrimination, were the Blahayil Nairs and the Syrian Christian landlords. The same trail, tells us that, towards the 1948-50s, when the peasant movement was at its strongest, and the Communists had taken over the leadership of the movement, it was almost unilaterally directed against, the institution of the Adhikari who continued to represent the colonial form of authority in the village, the Blahayil Nairs. The fact that, the collusion between the Police Inspector of the firka with the Blahayil landlords, against the Communists and the Harijans were reported by various respondents time and again during the course of the study also goes to show this.

The Nair taravadu, in connection with the land relationships in the village, is a common phenomenon of many a village in Malabar as shown by Dilip Menon (1994). This was true also of the village of Edathiruthy. The ceremony of *koithoottu* was one of the annual festivities by which the taravadu sustained its hegemony in the village. In bringing down the Zamindari system this hegemony was the target the Communists in the leadership gave to the peasants. In mourning the death of sardar as sacrifice the conflict between the upper caste landlords and the lower caste peasants gets a ritualistic form. The dynamics of this opposition is a most interesting

aspect to explore, that also shed light on some of the peculiar characteristics of relations of power that emerged in the village, reacting to the historic circumstances that saw the social movement at its high pitch; following Independence, when the Communists denounced the Indian State.

This is related to the framework of power that the Communists, while leading the peasants in their demand for land and basic human rights, challenged or locked horns with. This was a moment, according to the narratives of mourning that defined sardar as a sacrificial victim. But in ordering for him this role the structure of relations within his own caste itself had immense significance. It is in the process of this analysis that we take up the peculiar nature of the social role of the ezhava in the village for study.

In the caste hierarchy sandwiched between the landless peasants- the Vettuvass, Parayass and Pulayass on one hand and the landlord Nairs and Syrian Christians on the other, the caste in between had many hierarchical relations but it is difficult to say, that all members of the caste were exposed to a similar kind of hierarchical discrimination. There were quite a few landholders from amongst the caste and many of them were beneficiaries of the new system of education introduced by the Colonial administration. The spread of the spiritual movements by the reformer Sree Narayana Guru that had state-wide influence also had its impact in the village. The movement amongst the various ezhava families, in the face of their struggle to be adopted into the formation of egalitarian social groups, centred around temples and was one of the main reasons for the alienation of the caste members from traditional forms of worship like sacrifice and offerings of blood to their deities. So in mourning for sardar as a sacrificial victim, many of these forgotten traits of the caste's forms of worship could be

symbolically realized. This was not contrived by design but it happened unconsciously.

An understanding of caste, as defined by the system of exchanges of food and services, of the family as that of alliances and gifts is relevant here. With respect to the four main social divisions earlier described belonging to the various land-owning communities in the village, so far as the Ezhavas were concerned, it was mainly the family and its patrilineal descent that formed the locus of gift exchanges or the making of alliances whereas the other two- the caste identity and the professions- found their locus in power struggle around the exchange of food. This neat bipartite division (the division of the family's engagement with the outside world into one directed by the need for making alliances and the need for exchanging food and/or services), turned acutely perceptible, in the face of police repression. The taravaadu complex's hegemonic effort also intensified through sharpening of the power conflict orchestrated by the need for greater appropriation of the proliferating democratic and public spaces, owing to the social and national movements. This was achieved by reinvigorating the most powerful of the forms of hierarchical oppression, that of untouchability.

The spread of modern education amongst the Ezhava was already opening different avenues of opportunities before them, when the age-old form of discrimination was being sought to be put back into practice. The number of indiscriminate police raids and the proliferation of a culture of terror, all allegedly at the behest of the Blahayil landlords, against the landless peasants and the Ezhava small land-holders, bear testimony to this fact, that of the reinstitution of the most reactionary and brutal face of caste oppression- untouchability.

Before coming to the impacts of this revival of the practice of untouchability as a ploy to operationalize the dynamic of the feudal power, we need to understand how two Ezhava families (for example the Kumbalaparambil and the Kollarayil) defined a space of totemic ‘opposition’ between them and thus sought a greater egalitarian space within the hierarchical structure of the caste society and untouchability.

As a testimony to this dualism in operation of caste system in the village I am adding a part from the monograph on the social history of the Manappuram, written in the form of a letter to me, by Ravi earlier cited. I have included the entire tract in translation (see Appendix) so that the larger perspective in which such a dyadic relationship is located becomes clear.

.....Thus, amongst the many groups that migrated through this strip, into the Manappuram the two groups that settled in Edathiruthy, Kollarayil and Kumbalaparambil must have come from the same place. Although local wisdom, transmitted by word of mouth over generations, says that the two families were friendly, there are two very thought provoking differences. When the number of ancestral deities and places of worship of Kollarayil family proliferated, the kumbalaparambil had little of any such installations for worshipping ancestral deities, till at least fifty years ago. In olden days, the two families never intermarried, between themselves. It has to be studied why the two families never intermarried, when one of them followed almost a kind of atheism and the other most ardently followed the worship of devan and devi.....

The concept of totemic opposition was introduced by Radcliffe-Brown (1983) into the study of social anthropology. Radcliffe-Brown arrives at the concept of opposition in his study of Totemism. In a path-breaking essay in the study of totemism²⁶ Radcliffe-Brown introduced the value of the

²⁶ This essay by Radcliffe Brown was thus applauded by fellow anthropologist Levi-Strauss, “Toward the end of his life, Radcliffe Brown was to contribute decisively to the solution of the problem of totemism by his success in isolating and disclosing the real problems which lay hidden behind the phantasmagoria of the theorists”(Levi-Strauss(1964:58).

comparative method for the study of societies. Here he compares the totems of tribes from two different parts of the world, one, the New South Wales, Australia (the clans Kilpara and Makwara) and the other in North West America(two exogamous moieties of the Haida). He shows how parallels exist in the myths relating to the relationship of the two birds – the eagle hawk and the crow in the former and the eagle and the raven in the latter. The legends serve to distinguish the two birds- one as a bird of prey and the other as a scavenger or a ‘thief’ in native coinage. He then proceeds to show how such relations of opposition exist between different social groups in many other parts of the world. Such relations extend to the ‘non-totemic’ Andaman islanders in their classification of species of animals and birds as human beings in society. The relation is also prominent in the ancient Chinese philosophy of the yin and the yang that ruled the marriage relations of the Chinese in 2000BC, which patterns of marriage extend to this day (i.e., in 1935) in China. These are various customs by which the societies have grappled with the concept of opposition or polemos/strife as Heraclitus defined it, in history. As such, it forms the fundamental category of all classification and the elementary tool for social anthropologists in a comparative study of human societies (Brown: 1980:108-129).

Totemism, according to Radcliffe-Brown, is thus a grouping of society according to relations of opposition and is therefore an ever inventive process, thus coinciding with the formation of new social groups in conjunction with objects of nature or culture. It was Radcliffe Brown, who thus paved the way for structural study of totems by Levi-Strauss that also harped on the inventive characteristic immanent to totemistic coinage in language. For Levi-Strauss totems retain their heuristic value for long periods of time, because “they are good to think” (1964:89).

The phenomenon of totemism was considered alien to the Indian society because of its caste system and hierarchical structure. Totemism definitely implied if not anything else, at least a lack of hierarchy amongst the different totems. Caste system apparently revolts against this equality as a norm. But, J.V.Ferreira (1965) in 'Totemism in India' has studied the existence of totemism, not as vestiges of an ancient tribal existence, but as a symbiosis by which the two communities, the original inhabitants of India and the invaders from outside, to whom are attributed the tradition of the Vedas, have co-existed over millennia and continue to do so. Quoting another scholar of repute who studied Indian totemism, H.Niggemeyyer, Ferrera says, the 'Aryans' who came in contact with the original inhabitants of the sub-continent did not practice exogamy, or if at all they did, it was blood-relationship exogamy and not group exogamy as is the main attribute of totemism. Out of their encounter with the drastically different culture of the oribinal inhabitants of the sub-continent has arisen the Indian phenomenon of totemism, as Ferreira argues. Quoting Niggemeyyer, he further clarifies that it is impossible to define the phenomenon of totemism based on the Indian examples. This is so, because every totemic phenomenon has to be derived from the cultural and natural relations under which it has arisen (Levi-Strauss:1964:17) .There may be no way to prove that Totemism arose in India, but Indian totemism is historically connected with that of other regions of the world. It has forms of phenomenon which are common to other parts of the world- the naming of a human group after an animal, plant and the rule of exogamy which forbids marriage between members of the same totem etc. Ferreira illustrates the process by which this symbiosis of the immigrant culture and the aboriginal culture took place in the Vedic and the following periods, with the help of a concept called continuum. Originally postulated by F.G.Bailey (1963), this continuum has at one end, a

society whose political system is entirely of the segmentary egalitarian type and which contains no dependents whatsoever and at the other end a society in which segmentary political relations exist only between a very small proportion of the total society, and most people act in the system in the role of dependents. Between these two extremes of the continuum it may be said, exists the Indian society with various castes, with the Brahmins allowing for group exogamy amongst themselves by their division into various gotras and the mountain tribes that allow for the most generous amount of totemism, replacing gods with animal, plant and ancestral spirits.

The exposition of Ferreira may be seen in other commentaries of caste as well. Iravati Karve (1961), says that the Indo-Aryan system of stratification into three major occupational and hereditary ranks or varnas namely priests, administrators and commoners was grafted onto an indigenous Indian pattern of interdependent and ranked tribes, thus creating a hybrid system of stratification. Karve says, "I think the full-fledged theory of caste very probably represents the working together into a single theoretical system of two separate types of organization present in two societies. Through this formulation of the caste society the two separate societies came to be represented as one society. The union of varna and jati is a matter of fusion of two systems from two cultures" (ibid:58).

Stephen Gould (1971) on the other hand suggests that, jati emerged out of the "occupationalization of labour" in which "occupational role and role occupant were identical" (ibid:8). He sees it as a universal feature of division of labour in pre-industrial societies. Ethnicity is historically assimilated to occupation and occupational rank in some cases, and in others, occupation assimilated to ethnicity and ethnic rank.

Gerald. D. Brennan (1983), who considers these two points of view, takes a view more akin to Iravati Karve's, without dismissing the views of Gould. He comprehends the Indian caste system in a phenomenon called the 'evolutionary status of caste'. He says that, jati is not merely a stratified formation. It has features also of unstratified societies within them. He understands this phenomenon, again in the light of the Indo-Aryan immigration and the meeting of two cultures. The phenomenon of caste hence is understood as evolutionary (ibid: 179). Louis Dumont (1972) also has maintained that exogamy amongst the families was essential for the caste system to hold its system of ranking and status in position (ibid:158).

That caste is not the final independent or 'self-sufficient' unit of social analysis of the Indian society has been pointed out by Louis Dumont (1983:132) elsewhere. Highlighting the instance of the caste of Nairs in Kerala, Dumont argues that the caste cannot be taken as an independent endogamous unit for analysis, for studying the Indian society. The ritually sanctioned nuptial union between Nambuthiri men and Nair women, known as *sambandham* is cited by him to prove this fact. As a result of this, the Nair caste is so variegated in its formation, that one finds, in the same caste, sub-groups ranging from landlords to washermen, some of whom are also untouchable within the caste. Although not a general phenomenon noticed elsewhere in the sub-continent, this exception proves valuable in contextualizing the institution of matriliney or matriarchy, which forms one of the foundational aspects in understanding society in Kerala.

Dumont (1972) says that isogamy was the general norm of marriage in South India, whereas in its counterpart, the Gangetic plains hypergamy was the norm. The prevalence of hypergamy in the North accounts for status differentiation within a caste, which fact is not possible in the South. It would

be mistaken to hold the *talikettu* performed on a Nair woman occasionally by a Nambuthiri man to be an instance of hypergamy, the only instance of hypergamy, that can be shown, if at all. The *talikettu* marriage ceases to be as soon as it is instated. Dumont (ibid:162) says that, it is a custom followed to maintain the Nair institution of matriliney, even at the base of the patrilineal Nambuthiri system. There is a rise in the status of the woman following the *talikettu*. In normal hypergamy the rise in status is neutralized following the *kanyadaan* or the gift of daughter in marriage. Whereas the *talikettu* symbolizes a Nair-Nambuthiri symbiosis, and a 'rite of passage' for the lower caste Nairs to a caste of higher ranking.

If we consider the marriage practices of the Ezhava caste from the village, it may be seen as allowing the use of both totem and caste symbols in articulating its world view or in constructing its social role. The system of exchanging services that ordained the basis for the functioning of the village economy formed the caste system in a nutshell. But, independent caste groups observed strict endogamy and for this purpose they were divided into separate clans. Such clans are known by their totem names, what in common parlance is called, the house name or the *veettuperu* (Ferreira:1965). The functional utility of these names was strictly exhausted in the terms of exchange of women. Hence the reason why they may be identified with the totem symbols of the moieties amongst the Australian tribes²⁷.

The co-existence of caste and totem within a matrilineal definition of lineage (in Malayalam there exists only one word for lineage and that denotes the line of descent as feminine *tavazhi*) as the world view of independent caste

²⁷ See Levi-Strauss(1962), section on Australian Nominalism, to see how the totem signs serve as clan emblems classifying them into different marriage groups or how rules of marriage and totemic classification coincide, in the case of Australian societies bordering the Arnhem land (ibid: 39).

groups, but had no effect whatsoever in deciding the power relations amongst the caste groups in which sphere a strict hierarchy held together by the practice of untouchability prevailed.

The marriage practices amongst the Ezhava families in the village have undergone radical changes in the last less than seventy or eighty years. The onus or responsibility on the part of the family of the bride to get her married has risen over these years. The institution of dowry that was not in practice amongst any of the castes, except the Brahmins also has gained much prevalence of late. L.K. Anantha Krishna Iyer (1909) while writing about the marriage practices amongst the Ezhavas, observes, "Among all castes below Brahmins, the proposal for marriage always comes from the side of the bridegroom. When a young man has to be married, his father and maternal uncle go in search of a suitable girl. When she is rightly chosen, they open the subject with her parents, who give their consent after being satisfied with the would-be bridegroom" (Iyer:1909: 289). Not merely that, the groom's party was expected to pay a bride-price to the bride's party for the marriage to be ritually sanctioned by the elders. Both the parties have to pay a customary fee of eight annas and a betel leaf to the village head man (*Thanadan*) to get his permission for the union. He issues a letter to *Ponamban*, his deputy, to oversee the ceremonies of the marriage. *Ponamban* gets a smaller fee of three annas and eight paisa and a betel leaf for the function.

In the social setting of the village, in 1940s and 50s, it is possible to argue that exchange- of food and services & women - formed the basis of this society. The distinction of the caste system held by Levi-Strauss (1966) stated the exchange of food rather than the exchange of women to be its

dominant principle. Gift as exchange with the binding liabilities to give and take on its partners could have been the unifying element of this society.

“Material and moral life, as exemplified in exchange, functions there in a manner at once interested and obligatory. Furthermore, the obligation is expressed in myth and imagery, symbolically and collectively; it takes the form of interest in the objects exchanged; the objects are never completely separated from the men who exchange them. The communion and alliance they establish are well nigh indissoluble. The lasting influence of the objects exchanged is a direct expression of the manner in which sub-groups within segmentary societies of an archaic type are constantly embroiled with and feel themselves in debt to each other” (Mauss:1970:31).

Mauss calls the most archaic economic system known to man, a system of total prestations-prestation (exchange) between clan and clan in which individuals and groups exchange everything between them. Mauss highlights the potlaches of the North West American Indian tribes as the best example of the potlach ceremonies. He even cites the kula ceremony amongst Australian tribes as prestations or gift exchanges of a total nature (ibid:41); that is a prestation and a phenomenon, that is at once economic, political and juridical. In the Indian context, he finds from the Hindu scriptures, that the priestly caste of Brahmins were allowed to live only on gifts presented to them by the king and other patrons(ibid:53).

Amongst the Ezhavas of the village, a gift economy of the nature that Mauss talks about existed; if at all it did so only in exchanges amongst the families of a single caste. The number of divisions within a caste made the idea of prestations amongst the castes insignificant. The gift economy prevailed only within individual caste groups bound by the alliances of marriage amongst

the specific families of each caste group. In terms of exchange of finished products or artifacts, strict utilitarianism was followed. The functional specialization of the different caste groups had made it indispensable. This realm of exchange was one of rigorous objectivity, and taboo - "of the institutional localization of danger, both by the specification of the dangerous and by the protection of society from endangered, and hence dangerous, persons" (Steiner:1967:147); one that operated with the axial distinction of its members into the touchable and the untouchable.

Edmund Leach (1966) also has pointed out the exclusivity of the clan's ritual or kinship relations from the realm of economic or political contestations. He maintains that, the cultural rules of caste behaviour establish a dichotomy in the total field of social relationships- political, economic and ritual relations are external, kinship relations are exclusively internal . He says, "in any system of kinship and marriage, there is a fundamental ideological opposition between the relations which endow the individual with a membership of a "we group" of some kind (relationship of incorporation), and those other relations which link "our groups" to other groups of like kind (relations of alliance)"(ibid:2).

In demarcating the realm of kinship ('relations of alliance')and caste('relations of incorporation'), in the everyday day form of existence, Leach is overcoming one of the fundamental shortcomings of structuralism in its effort to come to grips with the caste society, while also appreciating its contribution to the study of symbols. Leach reckons with ritual as an aspect of the 'external', along with the 'political' and the 'economic'. In comparison to the Marxist problematic of base and superstructure he deems it to be a part of the base rather than superstructure. Leach certainly makes a breakthrough here, in defining the ritual in the context of the caste

formations, as a part of the economic base but thereby implying that a change in the ritual relations can affect a change in the socio-economic order of the people.

The analysis of Susan Visvanathan (1993: 169), shows how the Syrian Christians of Kerala, under the influence of the nineteenth century reform movements, changed the role of Mary in their liturgy from an active one to passive one, thus fundamentally altering the mythic consciousness, for that denomination which accepted the reforms. By and large, this has to be seen as a phenomenon, that many other communities including different castes amongst the Hindus also adopted in their social reforms. The reforms have almost in all cases been initialized in a renewal or reordering of the sacred and spiritual realms. The path taken by Sree Narayana Guru towards monism (advaita) and the decimation of worship of many an ancient deity in its wake is a case in point. The reforms in any case, were to affect the richer sections of the caste, more so than the poorer sections. The Communist leadership, in the Edathiruthy village and the neighbouring villages in the firka, in claiming the support of the poorer sections of the community, on the other hand, encouraged the worship of the lower ranking deities of the Hindu pantheon, like Theechamundy, Karichamundy, Kuttichathan etc. The veteran leader of the CPI from the village of Anthicaud, comrade Sankaran, stressed how far these deities were significant in their every day lives, when faced with the stiff opposition from the Madras Government, that banned the sale and tapping of toddy, their traditional occupation, in the year 1948. The same fact (how Communism co-existed with the worship of these deities) is reflected in a short story written by a writer from the same village, 'How Many Jennys Are There In Anthicaud?' (*Anthicaudu Ethra Jennimaarundu?*)

The reform movement also affected another realm of their lives, that of marriages and subsequently the matrilineal form of social organization. As observed by L.K.Anatha Krishna Iyer, prior to that, the Nayar norm of matriliney held good for all the lower castes, as is evident from the upper hand given to the bride's party in choosing the husband of their choice. Effectively, this matriliney or its loss also lies at the bottom of rituals mourning Sardar as a sacrificial victim. The institution of matriliney also affirmed the prevalence of *Sakta* cult among the lower castes. The cult of an ancestral deity (Muthappan) and the Sakta cult of the Bhagavathy, that hall mark of Malayali worship according to Sarah Caldwell (1999), was shared amongst the various castes. The effects of the reinvigoration of the practice of untouchability, that the Blahayil landlords of the village, resorted to when faced with the crumbling of the hegemony of the taravadu complex in the village left its effects on these practices.

The first casualty of this revival was the kind of social interaction that existed between the various castes, even within the hierarchy of caste the system. Discussing the nature of authority exercised by the landowning taravadu or the Nayar household and its tenants and cultivators, Dilip.M.Menon says, "The degree of interaction between taravadus and cultivators was extensive, and there may have been less of a feeling of 'us' and 'them'. At the end of a working day, and more often on the occasion of festivals, the men of all castes would gather at the local toddy shop and experience a temporary camaraderie with their work mates"(1994:21).

When the police atrocities and raids intensified, they particularly targeted the lower castes that effectively nullified the social reforms of the earlier decades. The alleged naked parading of a lower caste woman, an incident which according to Bhaskaran (2000:75) was even raised in the Parliament by the then opposition leader A.K.Gopalan, also added to the phenomenon

of marking the human body as the site of social divisions. Considering that in the rigid demarcation of social spaces that arose from the situation of strife that followed the Communist movement's underground challenge to the Nair hegemony in the village, the man-woman relationships were also strained. Every relationship outside of marriage was considered either licentious or incestuous (the caricaturization of Sardar as licentious and promiscuous without ample evidence itself is a good enough proof of this).

The cognitive primacy of the virtue of contagion/lack of it (touch/not to touch) in the public space wrought by the functional specialization amongst caste groups made the totemic signification subdued. Exchange of women implied a certain touchability (between man and woman) and exchange of food implied a certain untouchability (between men). As a consequence the society was sharply divided and men themselves transformed into objects within the sharp divisions maintained by the definition of touchability/untouchability²⁸.

It is in this demarcation of social spaces and the isolation of castes as communities that bent under the weight of the oppressive caste-system that a 'culture of terror' to be discussed in detail later, found its manifestation. In the event of such objectification, the human beings had become either objects for procreation and sustenance of the species or units of production for the sustenance of the economy.

If totem classified the objects of nature into taboo/not-taboo, caste did it with men in society. The intelligible structures of understanding in such a society separated men with a high precision in signification of touch/absence of touch. This division and the harsh objectivity it invited on men, prepared the

²⁸ Regarding the notions of purity/impurity, a variation of the touchability/untouchability, Dumont(1972:98) says that "the opposition of pure and impure appears to us the very principle of hierarchy, to such a degree that it merges with the opposition of superior and inferior: moreover, it also governs separation".

foreground for the severe forms of cruelty and torture as punishments to taboo, early pre-modern society of Kerala is recorded to have had and consequently its 'space of death' and the 'culture of terror'.

If, totem still provided the clue for alliance formations through marriage or exchange of women, it no longer ruled the relations of power. It was merely a subdued realm of hospitality where terms of kinship were paid their due obeisance, without upsetting the ritual hierarchy, that ruled the relations of power. The rules of power that sharply distinguished kinship or totemic groups from caste groups, made certain that no totemic signification or rules of marriage entered the realm of authority²⁹.

In this chapter I have tried also to locate the scenario that laid the backdrop for the social drama of transformation represented in the death of Sardar. The change in caste and kinship related practices underwrote the representation of Sardar as a victim more so than ever.

²⁹ Discussing the relations of authority, in this formation, and the force of power in grounding their acceptance, Dilip.M.Menon (1994) makes these valuable observations. The exercise of this power directed the movement, dress, and speech of lower caste tenants and labourers—"It was not so much the operation of an abstract set of rules which is evident in the restrictions but the fact that deference was embedded in quotidian routines of speech, dress and manner. It was in the practice of certain actions and modes of behaviour within a specific situation, i.e. the interaction between high and low castes, that the relations of power were emphasised. The enforced repetition of gestures and speech forms sought to make seem natural what was arbitrary and imposed" (Menon:1996:19).

CHAPTER 5

DECONSTRUCTING AN ARCHIVE OF THE SACRED

Having dealt with the historic, economic and anthropological characteristics of the mourning related to Sardar's death we move on to define a realm of the sacred which is constituted within a confluence of places, names and objects related to historicizing the memory of his death. Though symbolic in construction this realm of the sacred works its way towards a form of historic objectivity by using its constituent elements within the form of a general economy (Bataille : 1991:1993) that gives the sacred realm its ritualistic effect.

To begin with this realm of sacred is constituted in total exclusion of the law. It is conspicuous by its absence. The same law which it is believed records the birth and death of every citizen, the same law that declared itself sovereign in representing the citizens, in giving to themselves through a written draft -the Indian Constitution- the basic freedoms and rights of a democracy but denied a register inside the law of the event of death of Sardar. This eventually led to the many registers of his death being archived within a realm of the sacred.

This archive of the sacred initially came to be represented in traditional ways of recording the basic facts about a human life. It was in the performance of his cremation rites (*atiyanthiram*) that this was achieved. It was done in the absence of his corpse. In such a case as usual the symbol of a corpse took the place of his corpse. But it did not end there. The cremation rites were performed twice. The first time, because of a prevailing ambience of unease amongst his relatives for fear of police raid if they participated in it, the rites

could not be completed. So a second attempt was made which was largely to the satisfaction of everyone.

But death imparts a dual and painful process -of mental disintegration and synthesis- for the society as a whole. This process was to be completed before the society recovered its peace after triumphing over death (Hertz: 1960: 86). The crematory rites did fulfill the requirements of this crisis to some extent. But it was restricted in the sense that it was only his kins group that was party to it. Eventually the realm of sacred grew, with him being recognized a martyr of a political movement, a victim of ritualistic desire, a primordial desire for the collective in the villages of Nattika firka. The commemorations of the martyrdom day posts as a critical and radical choice; death , in the form of sacrifice to fulfil, the greater requirements of society for collective bonding, much more so than affirmation of faith in a document; deed or draft of Rights (the Constitution that was adopted on the same day), adopted through mutual consent. They seek to portray in death as sacrifice, a form of generative violence characteristic to the sacred (Girard 1988:269).

The graphic description of the Firka region given by C.Achuytha Menon one of the early leaders of the Communist movement from Trichur in his preface to the novel called Innaley inspired by the life of Sardar is indicative of this desire. He writes, “running from the shores of the Kodungallure estuary in the South till the shores of the Chettuva estuary in the North this land filled with loose sand (*puzhimanal*) stretching through the middle of the western sea and the connoly canal is known as the Manappuram in native tongue and

Nattika firka in the revenue or government parlance³⁰. Though not fortified by nature the ends of this land have been neatly defined by it. The efforts of Lord Connolly who cut the canal justified the designs of nature in defining its borders. Thus this land had many geographical, historic and administrative peculiarities. It is not an exaggeration then to mention that from the given peculiarities emerged a peculiar cultural scenario in this land”.

The novelist E.V.Gopalana in his introduction to the novel adds that the subject of his first novel emerged out of a desire to portray one of the most eventful periods in the history of his native land, manappuram. He continues in a strain similar to the writer of the preface to his novel “those days the white spread of sand along this manappuram were reddened by the blood of Gopalakrishnan. It had overwhelmed me.” This is a self-evident reason that shows why he chose to name his novel first published in a serial form in the periodical Navayugam as *velutha bhumi* (or white sands).

³⁰ Glossary

Taluk The most important revenue division within a district. There were ten in all in the Malabar district of Madras province in British India. The tahsildar formed the highest revenue authority in a Taluk.. The Deputy tahsildar had responsibility of only a sub division of the Taluk.. No pecuniary limits were set on the extent of their jurisdiction.

Firka A *firka* was a revenue division within a Taluk of British Malabar. It was of little significance in administrative terms but still retained certain powers through a revenue inspector in terms of collecting the taxes. The *firka* was merely a revenue unit and the revenue inspector who was in charge of the registration of lands in the *firka* and the due assessment and collection of taxes had no other powers than revenue.

Amsam A combine of two or three villages or *desams* The main bulwark of the British revenue system. The *adhi kari* was the highest revenue authority in an *amsam*. They also exercised magisterial powers. The *adhi karis* had both civil and criminal jurisdiction in suits for money not exceeding Rs.20 in amount.

Nattika firka (before 1956) Nattika *firka* was a conglomeration of fourteen villages. These were the villages or *amsams* of Engandiyur, Vatanappilly, Thalikkulam, Nattika, Valappadu, Edathiruthy, Chenthrappinny, Kaipamangalam, Perinjanom, Koolimuttam, Pappinivattom, Padinjare Vemballur, Panangadu and Aala. It covered an area of 13733.06 Hectares.

Nattika firka (today) The villages that originally constituted the *firka* was already split between the two *firkas* of Nattika and Kodungallore, in the Taluks of Chavakkadu and Kodungallur respectively.

The idea of a generative violence fundamental to rituals; and ritual as such as the foundation of society were often neglected by modern philosophy or/and social theory. Hence, they often made recourse to a social contract that is implicitly or explicitly rooted in “reason”, “good sense”, “mutual self interest” and so forth (Girard: 1988:259). In the mourning of sardar’s death the realm of sacred assumed that the Indian Republic in its foundation incurred nothing less than the sacrifice of a human life.

It is in this respect that a couple of objects that belonged to him assumed a sacred function. They were his watch and pen. His pen became the subject of a short story by Damodaran Pottekkattu, friend of Sardar and also an acclaimed writer. According to P.K.Gopalakrishnan, his comrade these two objects which were left to him by sardar were later transferred to Jyoti Basu at a meeting of the Communist Party organized at Calicut in late 1951. Even though their whereabouts are unknown to the firka now, they have taken their place in a ritualistic ordering of space distinct from his corpse that was disposed of with the accompaniment of no ritual at all. The objects that are used in a sacrifice are consecrated and hence deserve special attention (Hubert & Mauss: 1964: 48). The martyrs’ watch and his pen in this case enter a *piaculum*- a ritual space wherein expiatory rites are performed for a departed soul ; which is represented by the stage upon which they were handed over to Jyoti Basu by P.K.Gopalakrishnan. From then on these objects were observed as sacred in value that showed its utility in pointing to the absence of a positive historic value in all such representations as the aesthetics of a short story or the gist of an essay paying homage to the memory of the victim³¹. The complete lack of recovery of anything written

³¹ Reference here is to the short story *pena paranja katha* by D.M.Pottekkattu and the memoir by P.K.Gopalakrishnan, both taken from the commemorative souvenir on Sardar, *Chirasmarana*.

by Sardar himself adds to the negative value with which his pen is historically constituted as a part of the sacred³².

In a way the same can be also said about certain places associated with the mourning of Sardar's death that they have transformed themselves into theaters of worship as spectacles of landmark that preserve the memory of the martyr. This is true of the martyr's column or pillar erected in his memory in the village of Edamuttom or the spot by the sea shore in the village of Valappadu where his corpse was allegedly buried by the police.

It becomes most visible if one takes a closer look at the topography of the memorial at Edamuttom. At the village junction of Edamuttom there stands the memorial column for Sardar close to the National Highway that was built in the sixties, an unmistakable sign of modernity in the village. This road earlier, a mud track was modernized following Independence and renamed the National Highway 17 (NH 17). If the phallic looking octagonal pillar erected in front of the Local Committee office building of the CPI stands to the West of the Highway, to the East of the Highway and facing the pillar stands the feminine; dome shaped mausoleum for a reputed Ayurvedic physician from the neighbouring village of Kazhimbrom, Cholayil Mami Vaidyar. Both Sardar and Mami Vaidyar belonged to ezhava caste, but both represented, in a more or less contemporary life time, distinct and often mutually contrasting ideologies in the social milieu of their time. Sardar is often cited as the prototypical comrade or activist of the Communists, and Mami Vaidyar as a follower of the teachings of the social reformer Sree

³² Any written matter surviving from *sardar* was unobtainable because any such matter, if at all existed, were immediately destroyed following his death, wherever it was kept. This was done out of sheer fear of the police who could frame charges for keeping libelous literature or out of fear that, should such material come into the hands of the police, they may lead to the capture of the communists.

Narayana Guru³³. Both of them share one thing in common though, the space of death. If sardar is believed to have virtually foreseen his death at the hands of the police on the first Republic Day of India, Mami Vaidyar is believed to have attained samadhi³⁴ at the footsteps of Sree Narayana Guru who also is believed to have died in a similar fashion³⁵.

The landscape at the sea-shore where he was buried is another that transforms into a sacred ground every year before the anniversary of his death. On the 21st of January every year known as the Flag Day of the Communists or Lenin's Day i.e. the day of Lenin's death (21st January) a flag post with the red flag goes up at this spot which remains there till the 26th of January, when the martyrdom day rally begins from the same spot after the participants of the rally shower petals of the red flower hibiscus (chembarathy) at the bottom of the flag post. The landmark transforms into a piaculum or a sacred space for a ritual on these days. The spot of his burial was thus reclaimed through repeated occasions of mourning over decades into a historic process begun with the day of his death.

Similarly the mnemonic function performed by the place called the Nattika firka is contrasted with its revenue- based legal definition. The Nattika firka at the time of sardar's death was a part of the Malabar district of Madras State but today it is a part of the Trichur district of Kerala State. The villages that comprised the erstwhile revenue division of the firka today lay scattered in different taluks under the Trichur district. Many of the villages that were a part of the firka now come under the Kodungallur taluk whereas the Nattika

³³ Sanoo(1986:497), says that Mami Vaidyar was alongside the Guru, even in his last days, supervising and attending to the treatment of his illnesses that had set in late. Along with Mami Vaidyar was Panavalli Krishnan Vaidyar, another disciple of the Guru.

³⁴ It means the well anticipated and timely departure of the soul from the body and is often associated with the way the Buddhist monks died.

³⁵ In local parlance, as well as Government calendar, the death of the Guru is referred to as Samadhi.

firka of today is a part of Chowghat taluk. For example Edathiruthy village earlier discussed in detail is a part of the Kodungallur taluk today and no longer a part of the firka. Notwithstanding this there exists, through the representations of Sardar's death, a finite enumeration and a deep rooted nostalgia for an association with the names of the fourteen villages that comprised the Nattika firka in the Malabar district which actually formed the rear or southern end of the district with the Cochin taluk located a distant eighty kilometers further south and separating Malabar from the princely state of Cochin.

The first anniversary of his martyrdom publicly commemorated on the 26th January 1952, unfolded itself as a scene of spectacular mourning with loud wails and cries by the participants turned out to be exceptional because it was the occasion for an unshackled display of grief which was hitherto contained for the fear of the police. The cathartic feeling of community experienced in this event laid down the script for the future commemorations. The mourning soon grew from wailing to laughing and merry making being one of the rare occasions when the women and children of the households got an opportunity to go out of their homes. With programs lasting late into the night, people would go prepared for a Rabelaisian holiday folded mats in their hands for the family to rest. The cultural fete invariably hosted several shows like kathaprasangom³⁶, dramas, orchestras, singing etc after fiery speeches by the leaders of the Left.

An understanding of the realm of the sacred is also crucial for the system of justice that these representations bear within. A legalistic system of justice would aver the punitive aspect to his death. But a ritualistic system would not do so because ritual is that realm of sacred that approaches its victim not

³⁶ A Form of story-telling set to songs and music.

with the punitive form of desire understood in a legalistic sense but with a sacrificial generative form of violence (Girard:1988:298).

Hence it becomes significant to note that the policemen of the Malabar Special Police are always condemned for having killed him but are never held to be responsible for it. There is a reference time and again to his rivalry with the Police Inspector which many people believe took things this far. It is a theme of masculine rivalry that is described here according to which the Inspector of Police, though a man of stature was dreaded and feared owing to his casteist and chauvinist ways. In a memoir written for the souvenir published on the 50th death anniversary of Sardar, his contemporary wrote that this Inspector and his gang of Congress sympathizers called Home Guards even paraded a lower caste woman naked on the street of Nattika for her Communist leanings (Bhaskaran:2000:75).

The Inspector and his policemen were always condemned if not ridiculed through similar stories³⁷. But they were never accused. There is a crucial difference between the two in that, if the former is already a conclusion, the latter is pending a conclusion in a court of law. This is due to the sacred realm which working as a system or mechanism of the ritual “in a single decisive movement, curtails reciprocal violence and imposes structure on community” (ibid: 317).

Although the police are condemned and ridiculed in popular perception, in individual descriptions of this rivalry between the Inspector of Police and Sardar a lot of mutual respect is also seen. So it was impossible for either of them to have taken advantage of a situation similar to the one which killed Sardar of the opportunity to bring harm to one’s opponent. When the two

³⁷ For example in the village of Mathilakom one man recalled a policeman by the name Cheycku who was nicknamed *erumacheycku* apparently for the way he walked.

meet as the volunteer captain of the rallyists and as the Inspector of the Police at the village of Mathilakom what the Inspector tells Sardar is a word of caution "sardar, today is not the day we are destined to meet". The fatalism underlying the statement redeems the Inspector in a ritualistic way from any charge of crime from the course of events that followed. Similarly regarding the altercation between the policemen and Sardar after the latter's battered body was flung inside the police van that was waiting it is recalled that a loud noise was heard from inside the van. It has been told that it was difficult to decide if it was the last sigh of Sardar when he breathed his last or the victorious laughter of the Inspector.

The stories of the miserable death that the Inspector died in abandonment and want with no one to care for in his home town/village notwithstanding his past influential status, allude to the guilt that he allegedly bore for the atrocities that he, along with his policemen had committed on the people of the Firka. Though few could recall by name the native place of this man there are at least a few who claimed to have seen him in absolute destitution in Calicut. This image of atonement has become fixed in the representation of this rivalry.

The style or the manner of presenting the story of their rivalry is often fatalistic. The fact that the Inspector represents an arm of the law is seldom pointed out. The fact that the fight of the police and the Communists on the 26th day of January did not reach courts of law nor was there ever one legal witness of the death of Sardar also contributed to the exclusion of modern constitutional law in the mourning of his death. But without much delay with respect to another instance, the law of the country was forced to give its verdict on such matters related to the rights of citizens in democratic India as was voiced through the *puravakasa jatha* in Nattika firka.

A.K. Gopalan, prominent leader of the CPI who was imprisoned under the Preventive Detention Act in 1950 on charges of fomenting rebellion against the state had challenged the Act's authority to take action against the citizens of the country citing the Article 13(2) of the Constitution which said that the State shall not make any law which takes away or abridges the Rights conferred by Part III (Fundamental Rights) of the Constitution. Though it turned down A.K.Gopalan's plea in A.K.G. v State of Madras, in a monumental decision in one of the most important cases of constitutional importance in the history of Indian judiciary the Court, nonetheless stipulated that, clause 14 of the Preventive Detention Act which held that the grounds of such detention cannot be disclosed even in a court of law, was invalid.

The police did register many cases against the communist leadership in the firka in the aftermath of the rally. It charged a case for an attempt to attack the Mathilakom police out post and filed cases against 39 Communist volunteers chosen and picked up from the firka's leadership of the Communists. P.K.Gopalakrishnan was one of them. He recalled that he was not a part of the demonstration even though he was one of the prime accused in the case framed by the police. But the apparent negligence with which it was filed overlooked the constitutional import of these cases. P.K. Gopalakrishnan himself gave the instance of other cases that were charged against the Communists during the same time which had not even an iota of political or constitutional importance to them. Thus one of the cases was for trying to persuade the wife of a former Communist to pour acid into her husband's eyes.

Not only this, but the police were also notorious for aberrant reaction in the face of a political emergency. Following the rally on the 26th of January 1950

a man from Perinjanom in Nattika firka was arrested who was not even remotely identified with Communism in those days, or even later, was arrested. The only reason people could surmise as the grounds for his arrest was that he had distributed some sweets on the Republic Day. This probably incurred the wrath of the police although it remains unclear as to why such an innocent act should provoke the police. There are also those who believe that members from either the ezhava or the Moslem community may have tipped off the police that this man had links with the Communists in order to frame him for communal reasons. Born a Hindu he was a convert to Islam for a brief period before deserting that religion and seeking to convert back to Hinduism.

In yet another incident of a similar nature a man was arrested from Perinjanom because he had a common surname with a Communist leader the police were searching for. The Communist leader had gone into hiding following the rally on 26th January 1950 and apparently in their frustration in not gaining any clue of his whereabouts the police surmised that if the surnames were identical it suggested they both belonged to the same family and therefore liable to be prosecuted.

This political surplus is a result of a deep rooted political awareness amongst the villages of the firka where the politics of the CPI found great resonance. In the course of the field work one remarkable thing that I noticed was that for most of the respondents who were from the lowest castes in the village—mainly pulayas, paraiahs and vettuvas—identified themselves as Harijans, the name with which Gandhiji had identified them. This indicates an early nationalistic awakening amongst them and its endurance till date. The Harijan Sangh was a very active unit in the village and worked in tandem with Kisan Sabha and Beedi Workers' Union, meeting in study classes,

under the blanket leadership of the early Congress leaders, who were subsequently the Socialists and then the Communists. It was the Harijan Sangh that hosted the underground movement of the CPI in toto, during the period 1948-52, in Malabar. The house-holds of the Harijans played host to the leaders of the CPI, hiding from the police. For this, they were often put to the most brutal ways of torture, very proudly announcing the “culture of terror” that flourished in the firka in those days, as we shall see in greater detail later. Their public meetings were often interrupted and the speakers were forced to speak to the crowd that Communism was meant for the destruction of the Country. At times they were taken by force to the temple and asked to swear upon the deity that they were not Communists. In the Firka, speaking at the gross level of caste, the lower caste untouchables bore the brunt of the consequences of the ‘adventurism’ of the Communists. Their pains of torture are not celebrated in any martyrdom though there were more than a few who succumbed to the police beatings and many more who were rendered invalid. Their houses were violated and almost each and every one of them was treated with extreme inhumanity. The police revelled in calling the entire family out of their homes, in the middle of the night and indulged in a kind of mimetic masochism by making the son beat his father or vice versa. These events are still remembered along with how a lot of them were paraded naked down the streets of Edathiruthy. Then at nightfall they were made to run back to their homes. One of them vividly recalled how, on a moonless night they, a crowd of twenty ran through thick and thorny pineapple bushes falling down the edges of ponds and channels but, kept running to reach a place of safety. Though the attainment of Independence was perceived to harbinger changes, nothing significant followed. Only the persecution intensified. Gandhiji, the person in whom they had all reposed

their faith, identifying themselves as Harijans, was a martyr by January, 1948.

The Communists were the first to react to this situation when, in Calcutta in March 1948, they emerged with a call for revolution. The firka leadership of the party gave it an emotional appeal and transformed it into a struggle of the people- the untouchables- who had lived and worked their land for many generations without any legitimate claims to it. The party knew that the strength of their ties with their land was inexhaustible. This laid the ground for the field of underground politics that in its turn became the field for the conception of a whole lot of new ideas and ideologies into the cultural milieu of the village in a remarkably short time.

Although the politics of the underground did not end in the firka with the death of Sardar and slow and often silent forms of rebellion continued throughout the years 1950-51, the emotional appeal generated in the course of events had virtually broken the back of the routine in at least the village of Edathiruthy. Most vivid reflections of its impact was given in the account of Ravi who recalled how people stopped greeting and even recognizing any one even remotely identified with Communism even if they were their closest kith or kin in the village corners and streets. It took two years hence for things to show any sign of change, before on the 26th January in 1952, the entire firka publicly mourned the death of Sardar.

To conclude it can be stated that the archive of the sacred was thus built in reaction to a threat in the form of history. The presumed authenticity in the writing of history given to the Law or to the state was given here in mourning to the right to representation but ensured by only the innocent certainty in awareness about death and the many ways in which its

representations can be multiplied without the fear of any taboo or law. The negation of a form of historicity thus conceived through mourning maintained its own form not merely through the purported act of negation but through an integrated performance of such act in the ritualistic commemoration of Sardar's death every year.

CHAPTER 6

A HETEROGLOSSIA OF REPRESENTATION

The mourning for Sardar which grew out of a collective show of grief as in the anniversaries of martyrdom gradually attained individual expressions which expressed itself in its most authentic way through the writing of a novel in 1967. But though such representations arise out of individual experiences they are no less collective as a form of representation which is why I use the term heteroglossia to designate them. The novel, though written with the expressed intent of narrating the life of Sardar, fictitiously reveals the individual's desire to represent him/her in a native expression of nation as a heteroglossia loosely structured around the mourning of Sardar. The concept has been used also to indicate the close kinship it bears with another concept as a form of collective representation, the carnival. Both the concepts have been used by Bahktin to study the Novel.

But first we need to locate the form of a consciousness heralded by the representation of mourning in the form of a novel. The novelist himself, a native of the firka, helped in no less a way in carving into shape the sense of grief felt in the loss of Sardar and paved the way for the novel being used as a narrative form that detailed the life of an Ezhava hero from the firka. This new form inaugurated by the novel was but found embedded in the stories of many of the respondents who had intimate experiences with Sardar to recall. The presence of the kind of heroism established through the novel made them into a form of heteroglossia of the nation. The restricted geographical limits of the firka were comfortably transgressed in these narratives giving them a new feel of the political idea of nationhood. But mourning for sardar in the form of a novel was the stem of these narratives especially for the ezhava in the firka who migrated to different parts of the world in search of jobs and livelihood.

The democratic spaces and the opportunities of participating in diverse cultural spaces opened up by the coming of Independence and other post-colonial developments initiated a cultural transformation in which the family (*veetu*) as a joint- collective was no longer the primary unit of social organization for the ezhava. Therefore, the unity of the caste as a community became difficult to sustain and the cults and rites in their ancestral temples were practised without the actual presence or participation of individual members.

These changes were happening with the arrival of the idea of the Nation and the dissipation of the collective in various directions of the post War scenario of life chances, which also integrated the new idea of Nation with a larger brotherhood of sovereign Nations or Republics. It is in these individuated circumstances that the mourning of Sardar came to resemble a 'heteroglossia'. Their representation of the community is through the memories of a heroic self that participated in a large array of world transforming events or happenings. Self- representation through ideologization is one of its overweening aspects. Mourning here occupies the crucial position of the bringing together of the memories of individuals through mimesis into the form of a collective or the heteroglossia. So much so that with respect to the consideration of biographies of the contemporaries of Sardar this form of mourning integrates them into a community represented as characters from a novel that speaks through the voices of many of its heroes. Such form of heroic self-hood within the multiple life histories of sardar and his contemporaries gives heroic significance in mourning to members of his family also. Sardar's nephew remembers, how while working in Abadan, Iran, he received a letter from his uncle that carried a black badge on it representing the passing away of Sardar. Or as yet another of his nephews recalls, how when working in Colombo, Sri Lanka, he made the effort to publish the news of Sardar's martyrdom in the daily

brought out by the Sri Lankan Communist Party, called Navasakthi .These stories are only a couple of examples that strengthen the heteroglossia as individuated expressions in mourning as a collective.

Migrations from the Firka and the conceptions of the new migrant identity in such circumstances give us the basic grounds to argue for the element of heteroglossia in these representations of mourning. These representations also allow for a transgression of the geographical space allocated for the rites (within the Firka of Nattika) of mourning.

In classifying these representations, a concept of tragic heroism is essential. A hero who, like in a novel, in struggling against the oddities of life, throws open his/her character in sympathy with the pains of a victim mourned in the death of sardar.

Bakhtin introduces the novel in complement to tragedy. While the latter is classical, epic and fully formed as a genre of aesthetic representation the novel is modern and in the process of evolving. But it is in linking novel with the tragic nature of Dostoevskian hero that the analysis of Bakhtin succeeds. The characterization of the hero in a novel as a social malady is itself proof enough for this. Bakhtin is not alone either in representing the hero thus.

Rene Girard in his study 'Violence and the Sacred' highlights the surrogate victimized role of the Dostoevskian hero as also having its origins in the rituals of sacrifice. For this he contrasts his theory of sacrifice with that of Freud's many of whose observations he acknowledges. "Freud made an important discovery. He was the first to maintain that all ritual practices, all mythical implications, have their origins in an actual murder" (Girard:1988:. 201). But, the mistake that Freud makes is "The hero monopolizes innocence; the mob monopolizes guilt. The flaw attributed to the hero is not his, but belongs exclusively to the crowd. The hero, then, is a victim pure

and simple, charged with a crime he did not commit. This concept of a simple one-way projection of guilt seems to me inadequate. Sophocles is wiser; he makes it clear (and Dostoevsky was to do the same in *The Brothers Karamazov*) that the surrogate victim, even when falsely accused, may be as guilty as others” (ibid: 203).

Girard’s observations on the nature of rites of sacrifice and the pertinent remark that he makes regarding the characters of Dostoevsky’s novel gives us reason enough to understand the nature of mourning the death of sardar as a sacrifice. But as individuated narratives they constitute themselves into heteroglossia. Following Girard one can also make the crucial methodological connection in linking the collective and individual forms of representation in mourning Sardar as a surrogate victim, who can be as guilty as the rest.

The writing of a novel made the stories that abound on the death of Sardar into mourning it as a heteroglossia. Indeed, as Bakhtin observes, “of all the major genres only the novel is younger than writing and the book: it alone is organically receptive to new forms of mute perception, that is, to reading” (Bakhtin:1981:3). As an aspect of the consciousness novel is a distinctively modern phenomenon. Approached in this way, from the insights gained from studying Bakhtin we thus learn that heteroglossia as a form of representation in the novel can be compared to several other dimensions of culture. As Bakhtin himself observes, “But of critical importance here is the fact that the novel has no canon of its own, as do other genres.....studying other genres is analogous to studying dead languages; studying the novel, on the other hand, is like studying the languages that are not only alive, but still young” (ibid.:3).

As noted earlier the novel *Innaley* (Yesterday) was written, inspired by the events of Sardar’s life, mourning the tragic heroism around his death in the

firka. Although it tries to represent biography in the form of a novel it comes to live more on its strength as a fiction. What it sought to do was to evolve a memory rooted in the form of a murder in the minds of the people of the firka into an epic. In its dedication it clearly states so. What it succeeded to achieve was give the many stories recounted about him a sense or feeling of the present, and not a distant past, which serves the fodder for epics, according to Bakhtin.

A sense of the present it was that was inaugurated with this novel. The interviews with my respondents shed more light on this from the Bakhtinian perspective of heteroglossia. The novel *Innalei* merits an analysis for releasing the epic features in mourning and giving it a more contemporary form of that of a novel. The novel by releasing the memories from its epic dimension reinscribed them within a dialogic remembrance of the same stories, thus allowing for a construction of the hero significantly different from the construction seen in an epic. This dialogism implied an emphasis on the innovation of language to express phenomenon and ideas related to mourning in a sense of the present.

The ideological halo of a martyrdom that binds the representation of his death is unshackled by the dialogism that proliferates about it. There is an intimate dialogue in progress when one imaginatively approaches it. Bakhtin's observations on Dostoevsky's heroes/characters (because the fact that every character in Dostoevsky is heroic and hero is a sign of social malady and incompleteness in Dostoevsky's novels) capture the nature of this dialogue. Bakhtin says, "one of his (Dostoevsky's) basic ideas which he sets forth in his polemic with the Socialists, is precisely the idea that man is not a final and determinate quantity upon which stable calculations can be made, man is free and therefore can overturn any rules, which are forced upon him" (Bakhtin:1973:48).

Bakhtin denies the existence of any single, unitary language that expresses all the ideas of any society. For Bakhtin there are many languages in the society all at once. There is a poetic language, the novelists' language, the professional language used by the people of different professions and even narrower social circles like families who invent a special family jargon and who shape their own languages. Bakhtin calls this state of affairs a heteroglossia. Accordingly, all languages of heteroglossia, whatever the principle underlying them and making each unique, are specific points of view on the world, forms for conceptualizing the world in words, specific world views, each characterized by its own objects, meanings, and values.

It also works against a monologic definition of culture that can even reduce human beings to the level of a classificatory norm, like a species of animals. It is against such a singular or monologic construction of culture that Bakhtin writes. His major area of study, as we already know is the poetics of the author or the novelist in Dostoevsky, for whom the category of speech, is multivocal and is heroic. Such heroisms produce distinct social types that the author identifies.

Heteroglossia also works against any assumption of a fixity of meaning to the words spoken in a language that assumes the idea of a unitary and singular identity defining the confines of a separate nationality. Heteroglossia in defining the linguistic-ideological sensibilities of the people conceive in every language a distinct mode of thought that decentres the very idea of language itself thus not allowing any singular entity to take its place. Language, according to Bakhtin, becomes one of many possible ways to hypothesize meaning. The heteroglossia anticipates an inner dialogism of the word that fulfills its meaning in the response of the listener. Thus it is also apart from rhetorical speech that presumes the listener as a passive entity. Needless to say, for Bakhtin the literary form par excellence that gives ample space to the revealing of the heteroglossia is the novel.

Contrasted to novel stands poetry, which is not dialogical. It is not rhetorical either. It operates on the basis of a single unitary language nonetheless. Poetry in its strife for maximal purity, works with its language as if it were the only language. This is where it avoids any contact with the heteroglossia of the languages that always surround it without ever coming into contact with it. The novel on the other hand is a dialogic involvement with the language that is stratified and as the result of uninterrupted ideological evolution, is fragmented into languages. Language here should be taken to mean an ideology that shapes distinct ways of life.

In studying Bakhtin we are actually trying to get to the bottom of a conception of heroism that was redefined through the writing of the novel *Innaley*. The ramparts of the consciousness that mourn the heroic death of Sardar is Dostoevskian, for life as ideology itself does not find a better portrayal than in Dostoevsky's novels. The hero lives for the sake of an idea that lives within his consciousness and is continuously in a polemic with him. A hero and an idea are inextricable elements of every one of Dostoevsky's novels. This idea more often than not assumes the form of a double that pulls the person away from himself.

Ironically it may seem this is not merely true of any single character; but of every character of his. Therefore hero is not the absolute focus of the novel over whose thoughts the novelist sways absolute command. On the contrary every character is so much in command of the story that all of them individually seem to exercise their power in sketching the narrative. It is in this vein that Bakhtin argues that Dostoevsky's novels are celebration of polyphonies/or as another Dostoevsky commentator, Viktor Shklovsky, writes that the conclusion of a novel signified for Dostoevsky the collapse of a new Tower of Babylon (Bakhtin:1973: 33).

For the author of the novel *Innaley*, the biggest hurdle must have been to transcend the ossification of the memories of Sardar in his death. No matter

what, every memory related to him wound down on the category of death. It gripped every thought, every event into its final unrelenting grip. His death was a throw back from the present to a past that is more uncertain than the future. The singular instance of Death covered all the memories associated with the personality of Sardar. January 26th was remembered for his death. A period of political struggle was remembered for his death. Members of his family were regarded for his death. A mere mention of the word “master” was coupled with the tragic sentiments compiled in the death of Sardar who is the prototypal ‘master’ for a generation. Any memory associated with January 26th 1950 hence was stumped by a pervading gloom of death. Benumbed by the fright of Sardar’s death and the horror of the police atrocity that followed the villagers were driven to a juncture from where prospectively anything was possible. But something stood high in front of them, something that blocked out their vision, not letting them discriminate what they saw. This was the nothingness of a space of death, of a murder that the law refused to take cognizance of. The novel in its distinctive style of mourning worked this nothingness into celebration. It was a unique complementarity that guided the extremes of its style of mourning the death of Sardar and freedom from fear. The perimeters of its play were indefinite especially with the concrete caricaturing that it makes of the Indian Republic on its day of ratification. Against such a background there emerges the destruction of the rhetorical unity of personality, act and event, all accomplished through the licentiousness of the heteroglossia³⁸.

³⁸ All the old links between a man and his act, between an event and those who participate in it, fall apart. A sharp gap now opens between a man and the external position he occupies – his rank, his public worth, his social class. All the high positions and symbols, spiritual as well as profane, with which men adorn themselves with such importance and hypocritical falsity are transformed into masks in the presence of the rogue, into costumes for a masquerade, into buffoonery. A reformulation and loosening-up of all these high symbols and positions their radical re-accentuation, takes place in an atmosphere of gay deception (Bakhtin, 1981:407-408).

The novel *Innaaley* opened Sardar's memories by some endemic design to itself as a heteroglossia in Bakhtin's definition. It opened ideologies of various strains even though he is known as a martyr of the Communists. Any unifying tendency could be coarsely violated in the very constitution of this representation. It revealed that any singular interpretation of his death was an impossibility. Thenceforth the stories spawned abundantly in the course of preserving memories dear to them. The distinction between fiction and reality was eclipsed in the overlay of events and incidents.

A chronologization of the events related to his death was brought closer to a sense of the present. Even the best chronologization that would end with a tragic foreclosure as it approached the death of Sardar on the 26th of January got a longer lease of life. For the benefit of mourning Sardar, his death was abstracted out of their lives to enter an order of infinity. This level of abstraction in its turn offered itself for the staging of a unique criss-crossing of ideologies. It assembled elements of how individuals relate to each other and also to a community with a distinctive idea of its past, present and future. That is where the heteroglossia of mourning enters the narratives of Kerala and Indian history³⁹.

It will be pertinent to go here into the pick of events that catapulted him into the role of a martyr as I collected from my respondents. He was born in 1915 to Ezhava parents and was seventh in line of a family of seven brothers and two sisters. He lost both his parents early in life and was guided into adulthood under the legal guardianship of his elder brother (fifth in line). His Father was a document writer for legal notices and land settlements. But

³⁹ The letter stamped with a black badge of mourning on it received by Gopalakrishnan's nephew in Abadaan, Iran and the efforts of another nephew to publish the news of his death in the organ of the SriLankan Communist Party may be seen as concrete examples of engagement with the heteroglossia of ideologies that constitute the Nationalism in this Country.

more importantly he was a well-respected middleman – a *thandar*⁴⁰ - in settling the disputes that came up in the village. In fact his reputation was so far-reaching that people from other villages used to come searching for him to solicit his services in settling disputes. Some of the noted clients that he

⁴⁰ The *thandan* formed an important feudal dignitary office, that controlled the affairs of all Ezhava families settled in a region identified as a conclave called the *kudy*. In Malabar, at the time with which we are concerned, the institution or the office had become redundant, because the ritual ordaining of an ordinary Ezhava into a *thandan* of a *kudy* was done by royal decree issued from the Zamorin's court. Since the beginning of the colonial administration, such decrees ceased to be and hence the rightful powers and duties. Yet, the fact that Chathunni, was addressed as *thandar* amongst the Ezhavas in the village of Edathiruthy gives reason to believe that the office must have carried on hereditarily notwithstanding its periodical renewal from the Court of the Zamorin or that a separate court decree for appointing the *thandar* was not in practice in Malabar. In contrast may be observed the role and status of the same office, in the neighbouring state of Cochin, that retained princely rule, even under the British suzerainty and hence continued many of the old practices of the Court.

L.K. Anantha Krishna Iyer writes about the *thandars* amongst the Izhavas of the State of Cochin thus, "In the southern parts of the State, only one man is appointed by the ruler of the State, for specified localities, and he is called the *Thandan* (head man of the caste in his village), whose privileges consist in wearing a gold knife and style (an implement used in writing), walking before a Nair with a cloth on his head, riding on a palanquin or a horse, carrying a silk umbrella, and giving a brass lamp borne before him, for each of which he pays separately a tax to the Government. Any person, using these privileges unauthorized, lays himself open to a penalty. His local deputies, who are *Ponambans* or *Vettukkarans* are appointed by him and besides them, there are elected men, two, four or six for each village or a number of villages, known as *Kaikkars* or managers, and their business is to make preliminary inquiries about social disputes and convene meetings before the *Thandan* for the arbitration and settlement of all such disputes. These are but relics of the ancient village communities. On occasions, such as a public *darbar*, a State procession etc., intimation is given to the head-man, who sends for the necessary caste-men to put up festoons and to sweep the roads. In Travancore and North Malabar, the head-men of the caste are known by the names, *Panikkans* and *Tharakkaranavans* (the senior men or head-men of the villages), whose social functions and status are substantially the same as those detailed above. Thus, in Cochin State the name *Thandan* is given to the head-man of the caste, while in the adjoining Taluks of Palghat and Valluvanad it is referred to a sub-caste, the members of which observe the custom of polyandry" (Iyer, 1909: Vol I: 306).

P.K. Balakrishnan, writing about the institution of the *Thandar* prevalent amongst the Izhavas writes about it to show the rigidity of the hierarchy that was followed in pre-modern Kerala in the name of the caste system. The numerous privileges that the *Thandar* earned as part of the princely decree or the *theettoram*, were restricted to his position within the Izhava community and not outside it. The *Thandars* had the privilege to decide on every question relating to the Izhava community. Rites of puberty, marriage and cremation – all followed the ritual sanctification of the *Thandar* in the Izhava community. They also carried the right to excommunicate members of the community that disobeyed them. In short, theirs was a role that ensured the canons of caste hierarchy was rigidly followed even at its lower rungs. (Balakrishnan: 1997: 385-393).

According to Menon, (1994: 18) where a Nair *taravadu* was more powerful, the headman of the *Tiyyas* caste assembly (*Thandan*) acted as the intermediary between his community and the ultimate appellate authority of the Nair.

had adjudicated for included the Nair landlord of his home village and another landlord from the neighboring village.

Gopalakrishnan, as sardar was named by his parents studied at the government school in Kattur the neighbouring village. School education here was limited to the third forum which meant for high school one had to go to Chowghat which was over twenty kilometers away and not affordable for a majority. Sardar and his elder brother who studied together at the Kattur school entered teaching after finishing their third forum. The government in the year 1934 as part of a new policy encouraged opening of private schools by giving an allowance of Rs.80 to anyone interested. It also distributed monthly allowances in salary for the teachers. This resulted in the mushrooming of schools in all the villages of the Firka. Although both sardar and his brother had begun teaching earlier the opening of new schools ensured finding a job easier than before. They later passed their matriculation when the government issued an order saying that school teachers with a minimum teaching experience of ten years may appear for the exam independent of whether they have attended the school for that or not.

The dominant question of the national movement as sardar saw it upon becoming a teacher was that of the practice of untouchability. In the year 1930-31 when he joined as a teacher at the Sree Rama Vilasam School in Chenthrappinny village of the firka a lot of groundwork had been already done by several social reformers against the practice of the caste system. Prominent among which was the movement led by Sree Narayana Guru⁴¹.

⁴¹ There have been several works on the life, thought and reforms initiated by the Guru. For the benefit of our thesis, we have relied on Guru's biography by Moorkothu Kumaran published way back in Malayalam in the 1940s. The copy that we read from had its pages missing that we are yet to conclude on its year of publication. The biography by M.K.Sanu, called Narayana Guru (1986), is another comprehensive work on the theme.

Sardar received the ideas of guru calling for the spread of education and the need for organizing the scattered community of the ezhava divided at various levels –like the divisions of the Thandan, Panicker, Punamban, Choan, Kuruppan- into one. The idea of equality amongst these sub-divisions cutting across the relative gradations in social and economic ranking was an appealing idea to the mind of Sardar⁴². This is borne out by an incident reported by one of his contemporaries thus. At the School where Sardar taught and of which his brother was the manager a relative of both distributed invitations for a wedding at his home. The letters were given in bulk to the teachers and individually to the manager. Sardar felt it was unfair to discriminate between the school manager and the teachers and reported it to brother. His brother who was also the manager of the school but stood by his relative's decision and tried to justify his act. Sardar held that his brother was trying to justify him because he was a relative and upon which he asked sardar to discontinue from teaching from the next day onwards (Vasudevan:1998).

But he stayed away from the the SNDP for its caste bias but continued with the reforms inspired by Narayana Guru(1856-1932). He was part of a different organization called Sree Narayan Guru Smaraka Samjam as part of which he organized activities around the Perumbatappa School in his neighbourhood where he organized classes for adult education and also started a library called Sree Narayana Library. But he did not teach there for a long time for not very clear reasons, and joined a girls' school in the village

⁴² This is understood from the fact that he began his social activism from the school in his neighbourhood called Perumbatappa, where he was the organizer of a lot of activities including a reading club, a sports club with a volley-ball ground and late night classes for adult education. Such activities were organized under the banner of the Sree Narayana Guru Smaraka Samajam (Gopalakrishnan, 2001), that shows his adherence to the teachings of Sree Narayana Guru. The Samjam was a volunteer force largely confined to the *firka* of Nattika and presumably was at dissonance with the SNDP (the pan-Kerala organization of the Ezhavas founded by Sree Naryana Guru in 1903).

of Kazhimbrom but left the firka soon finding employment with the British India Air Force.

Livelihood or political opinion hard to say separated the lives of sardar and his brothers. They had grown up very fond of one another in the absence of their parents. When his brothers were married and moved into separate houses from their ancestral home he also moved with them. Although he inherited ancestral property he never used it to set up his own home but certainly built a house in the piece of land where he hosted a family of their relatives.

It was during the days of severe poverty and rationing imposed by the British during World War II that sardar eventually left his village. His stint with the Air Force was not peaceful and he contemplated quick release from there. But this was not to be too soon and although there is no clear idea of his sojourns with the Air Force it is believed to have taken him to a few places in the country if not at least to Bombay and Kohima. From Kohima he had eagerly sought a transfer to Cochin. Although it is not very well known what train of incidents followed this it is assumed that he contemplated marriage with a woman from his home village and hence did not continue with the Air Force once the War was over.

The time spent in the Air Force had transformed him into a Congressman. He got job at a school in the firka and soon entered the phase of transformation that had by then become the norm with most Congressmen in Malabar- the conversion to Communism. This transformation was effected mainly through the group of teachers that formed the receptive ground for the national movement in Nattika.

Of his brothers four were teachers including himself and two of them also ran schools. Many more examples of such families can be given from the

village of Edathiruthy itself particularly from amongst the Ezhava. This is in addition to the umpteen such examples common in the fourteen villages of the Firka. It was into this milieu that the ideologies of nationalism, socialism and communism were received⁴³.

His ideological transformations which began with an appeal to social reform are often quoted as having taken a turn around in the appeal to gandhism and its open challenge to eradicate the practice of untouchability⁴⁴. His stint with the Air Force having opened new vistas of a nationalistic imagination his earlier commitment to issues of social reform were further confirmed. As a school teacher he was also an active participant in the Malabar Teacher's Federation activities. But this was to be yet another transformative phase in

⁴³ The spread of schools in Nattika in the 1920s and 30s had a lot to do with the beginning of Nationalism in the region. This in its turn had its moorings in the number of newly educated youth from the middle land owning class, the *kaanamdaars* mostly belonging to the caste of the ezhava and nair. With the material boost that they obtained with the Malabar Tenancy Act of 1930, (there was a re-survey of the land following the Act) giving them freedom from stringent rules of lease helped them in venturing into more differentiated forms of occupation. In further leasing the land to the *verumpattakkar*, while cultivating plots to which they had title they were at the same time peasants, landlords and teachers. This motley paradigm of services that they derived from the land and gave back to it made them a most unique expression of a class that played a vital role in the politics of the period. In serving a multiple role with regard to the relations of land ownership, they identified with a multiplicity of political formations. But the transformations into a radicalization of these roles finally led to their banishment from active and public life, and also made their identity as Communists fast.

Menon has argued the origins of the national and social movements in Malabar were expressions of a need for community (outside and beyond the Hindu caste system) distinctively expressed in the case of the Tiyya and the Nair. "While at a broader level, anti-imperialism and the sense of belonging to a nation could be the basis of an aspiration to community, at the local level, the question of difference was predominant " (1994:40-62). Thus identification with the Congress activity helped to build a sense of community amongst the *nair*. The *tiyya* had earlier responded with the construction of local shrines and organizing a community of equals -Tiyya equals- around them.

⁴⁴ This turn-around in terms of political vision in the life of Gopalakrishnan is one of the original contributions that the novelist who fictionalized Gopalakrishnan's life makes. The novelist, E.V. Gopalan who was also a part of the same landowner-school teacher-congressman-socialist-communist milieu that formed the bedrock of National and Social movements in the Firka is very convincing in pointing out this transformation in the life of Gopalakrishnan.

his life as later events show⁴⁵. With Communism it is that his gradual political evolution is conceived complete.

The alternative political vision of the Calcutta thesis⁴⁶ marked a radical departure in the political organization of the CPI. The ordering or functioning of cells or the primary units of the party became more rigid than ever in the act of critical self-examination bound on its activists. Sardar with a Dostoevskian essence of self is understood to have complied to its rigours so intensely that he sought it heroically entering into a dialogic embrace with his own self which he saw as representation of a social malady and trying to fulfil his life as an ideology⁴⁷. This unfortunately drove him into being a passive victim to such invocations of the dogmatic ideology of the Calcutta

⁴⁵ P.Krishnapillai whose name became synonymous with the word 'comrade' *sakhavu* and considered the single most important organizer of the party in Kerala vouches that the revolutionaries of Kerala came to be through a metamorphosis of stages that include the Civil Disobedience movement, Socialist party and the Communist party (Krishnan:1975).

⁴⁶ The World Federation of Democratic Youth and The International Union of Students convened in Calcutta, from 24 to 27 February 1948, for a conference known as South East Asian Youth Conference, for the purpose of devising a revolutionary strategy for the Asian countries that were emerging from the yoke of colonialism. It was agreed that the Communist parties in South and South East Asian countries must organize violent insurrections and civil wars to overthrow the bourgeois democratic leadership of their respective countries. The CPI Congress met in Calcutta on the following day and adopted a 'political thesis' saying that although Independence was won, "the freedom struggle has been betrayed and the National leadership has struck a treacherous deal behind the back of the starving people, betraying every slogan of the democratic revolution". B.T.Ranadive, the General Secretary of the CPI, took upon himself, the responsibility of engineering the 'final revolution' in India on the lines of the "October 1917 revolution in Russia.

On 26th March, the Government of Bengal Presidency declared the CPI an unlawful association throughout the province, raided its office in Calcutta and made a number of arrests. In Tellichery, the police allegedly seized a number of guns, cartridges and knives which the Communists had hidden in a cache. On 26th February 1949, the Communists attacked the DumDum airport in Calcutta, the adjoining engineering works of Messrs.Jessop&Co., and a Government gun and shell factory. On 9th March, the Communist dominated trade unions sought to paralyse communication by a strike of the railway, post and telegraph works.

In the Telengana region of Hyderabad State, about 2000 villages passed under Communist control and they undertook land reforms, held courts and passed judgments. The writ of the Government had ceased to run in these parts. On 29th September, the Central Government released a White paper entitled 'Communist Violence in India'. In the wake of this publication, the Madras Government imposed its ban on the CPI, and other Communist sponsored organizations. On 2nd January 1950, the government of Travancore-Cochin resorted to the same step (Gupta, 1988).

⁴⁷ See Bakhtin, Mikhail M. (1973), *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Ann Arbor: Ardis.

thesis to throw himself open to the most uncompromising critical self-evaluation. One of his neighbours remembered an instance where he sat alone at the back yard of his house after such a meeting and cried aloud all by himself.

In the details of his life, to the extent they could be covered, the depiction of heroism begins with the phase of activism when the CPI went underground. In 1948 the Madras Government cancelled his Teacher's Certificate and this incident drew him deeper into the movement⁴⁸.

The underground movement in the firka as it stands etched today, in most descriptions related to it, is one of antagonism between the police and the CPI. This had a crucial role to play in bringing the chain of events to its culmination in the death of Sardar. The message of the Calcutta thesis was initially delivered to the firka with the publication of a notice titled the Declaration of Rights. Notwithstanding their political differences the Harijan Sangh and the Kisan Sangh endorsed this notice brought out by the Communist Party. The notice asserted the rights of the peasants to their land and also alleged landlords' complicity in the police actions against them. With the publication of this notice began the activity of the Malabar Special Police (MSP) that was stationed in the Firka on special deputy for quelling communist rebellion. They earned particular disrepute as a result of the actions initiated by them against the CPI and its sympathizers.

In the events that led to the death of sardar the police especially the MSP played a significant role. It began with the first round of arrests in Nattika by the police following the celebration of the Telengana Day on the 25th of April. The main charges against the accused were shouting slogans against

⁴⁸ Gopalakrishnan P.K (2001), *Sardar Gopalakrishnan*, Chirasmarana, Edathiruthy: Sardar Smaraka Pathana Kendram.

the Congress government and swearing the resolve to end landlordism. Seven comrades were arrested following this celebration. The arrests alerted the Communists about the gravity of the situation that was arising before them. So they moved into a state of hiding or underground intended mainly at taking cover from the police day and night⁴⁹.

On January 23rd 1949 the MSP began the notorious raids in Nattika under the initiative of the new Sub-Inspector. There was a camp of the communists in Kattoor in one of the sympathizers' houses. Across Edathiruthy river was the village of Kattoor which was a part of the princely state of Cochin. Kattoor offered immunity to the communists from the police because the CPI was not yet banned there. The Communists availed themselves to full measure of the sanctuary that Kattoor offered them from the police of Malabar. But this time the police surrounded this house in the night at 3AM. To the dismay of the comrades the police from Irinjalakuda in Cochin State under a sub-Inspector had teamed up with its counterpart in Nattika for the raid of the communists. After the arrests they were made to cross the river that separated the villages of Kattoor and Edathiruthy and they were handed over to the newly appointed Inspector of Valappadu station in Nattika firka. The alleged charge against the accused was conspiracy to upset the government. Those arrested could not be chargesheeted and were let free by the magistrate after remand custody of fifteen days.

It was against this backdrop that there unfolded two strikes – the bidi workers' strike and the oil mill workers' strike- both of which took place in Edathiruthy. It was in March 1949 that the the bidi workers' began a strike

⁴⁹ The information on these arrests and the details of the strikes and processions by the Communists, leading to the January 26th 'Rally for Citizens' Rights, were given by K.K.Abhimanyu. Later, he published most of what emerged in our discussions in an essay titled *Sardariney Orkkumbol* (Remembering Sardar) in the souvenir of the CPI Mandalom Committee on the fiftieth anniversary of Sardar's martyrdom, in the year 2000.

against the arbitrary ways of the factory owner in withholding the wages of the workers and reducing the number of their workdays. The workers in reaction decided on a sit-in strike. This meant that they would take their respective places in the factory on a working day but instead of working they would strike and shout slogans demanding their rightful wages.

A police case framed by the owner against the striking workers forced them to go underground and it was followed by a manhunt in the night by the police. Several people were arrested. Those who escaped the arrest joined in a flash demonstration the very next day. This provoked further arrests. Not all those booked could be arrested. Those who escaped the arrest procured their bails directly from the magistrate thus continuing their evasion.

Sardar emerged prominently into the leadership of the communists and also into sharp antagonism with the police with the strike of the workers in the oil mill at Edathiruthy in the month of May 1949. The mill had around twenty workers all of whom were already activists or supporters of the CPI. Their main demand was to fix the number of working hours at eight hours a day. The labor laws that enforced this conditionality were glossed over by the owner of the mill. The workers gave a notice to the management saying the labour laws should be implemented for them.

Following the memorandum a meeting followed in Edathiruthy bazaar where Sardar spoke explaining the object of the workers' strike. A group of policemen, no more than five in number, moved towards the meeting. The listeners slowly receded seeing the police approach. The Head Constable who led them wanted to arrest Sardar once they reached near him. He not only denied them his arrest but asked them to move aside and asked the people to come nearer to him. Then he gave a forceful speech lasting for

about half an hour. The police were outwitted and speechless. Once he concluded the speech and finished the meeting he along with his friends made a brisk escape to Kattoor. The strike had its expected outcome. The District Labor Officer intervened and fixed the working hours at eight hours a day.

The Madras District Board⁵⁰ elections on September 25th 1949 was the last occasion when Sardar was publicly seen in the firka. The elections had engaged the party in a fight with the Congress. K.Sekharan Nair was its candidate for the constituency of Nattika firka. By way of campaigning no demonstrations or meetings could be organized for its candidate because a virtual ban was already in force against the party. Nonetheless a few activists of the party managed to surreptitiously raise slogans supporting the party candidate in a Congress meeting in Edathiruthy. This was followed by a rally the following day against goondaism by the Congress on the party activists. On the day of the election Sardar was in charge of coordinating the polling agents for the party. The agents faced a threat of arrest and had to vanish the minute the polling was over. That evening immediately following the elections the Government summarily banned the Party.

For the Communists the ban meant total disappearance from the public. They had to go completely underground. They could not be seen anywhere in daylight. If they were reported to be seen somewhere or hiding at a certain place, the police immediately raided the place and arrested them. Therefore their movements had to be finely calculated. The danger of being caught increased with the police finding useful informants from the Congress party. The informants told the police the whereabouts of the Communist leaders in

⁵⁰ The governing body for the district of Malabar with limited discretionary powers; nonetheless powerful in deciding matters relating to education and health

hiding. This was the time when it met in units of five each. Every unit was called a cell. The cells continued to operate the propaganda of the communists for revolution and change. Taking much risk on their lives certain activists even managed to stick party posters even in the police station at Valappad.

The finale of the clashes with the police came on the 26th of January 1950. The day was to mark the coming of the Republic of India, the enactment of the Constitution and the swearing in of the President as the head of the Republic. The Manifesto of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of India on the New Constitution (1950) read “Workers! Peasants! Students! Women! Members of the oppressed middle classes! Demonstrate against this exploiter’s Constitution, this Constitution of national enslavement on January 26th.....
.....The Communist party calls upon the entire working class of India, upon all working class organizations, to demonstrate the unity of the working class on the AntiConstitution Day, despite the efforts of the Socialist disruptors(ibid:7).

The news reached the various local units at the taluk and village levels including the Nattika Firka fast. The movement was rather weak in northern Malabar due to widespread arrests by the police. Nattika Firka was one place where the repercussions were yet to be felt, but for the terrifying presence of a villainous inspector of police. The cells of the Party in the Firka met and decided to register a strong protest against the Congress government on the first Republic day. The decision was also taken that in the demonstration on the particular day Sardar should lead a demonstration with the communist flag. It was also decided that the Rally should proceed no matter what came in the way till its destination in Sree Narayanapuram where it would disperse

after a public meeting. It was next to impossible to hold a peaceful demonstration. Everyone knew this fact. But still the resolution was taken fast and there was no going back on it.

Two significant developments took place between the local leadership's decision to hold a rally and the day it was scheduled. They were two police arrests in which three of the main leaders of the party were interned. One was P.T.Bhaskarapanicker who was brutally assaulted before the arrest. A week later T.K.Raman and K.S.Nair were also arrested. This spread ambiguity in the minds of many if the proposed rally would ever be held. The residue of leadership that remained met on the 24th of January at the house of Sankaran, a sympathizer in Kaipamangalom village. Apart from Sardar it included Tharayil Velayudhan, Kalarikkal Naryanan and K.S.Kunjitti. They resolved to hold the proposed rally even though a majority of the leadership was behind the bars.

On the 26th of January the volunteers for the Rally met in a sympathizer's house at the village called Perinjanom. There were about fifty of them of which around twenty were school children. They were from the Upper Primary school at Perinjanom infuriated over the arrest of P..T.Bhaskarapanicker. In the afternoon about 4 o' clock the rally began. They marched in two lines with Sardar leading from the front carryingt communist flag and Mohammad Younus bringing up the rear. The people came out in large numbers to watch them. A *jatha* (Rally) by the Communists was the last thing anyone expected on that day.

On the way towards their destination the marchers neared the police outpost at Mathilakom. The police cops from the MSP were already marching towards them. Upon reaching the procession the Inspector shouted to them

that they were all arrested and the procession was dispersed. Neither the police nor the Communists cared for a reply. In not less than a second a clash followed. The police successfully dispersed the demonstration and arrested Sardar along with three others.

Accounts of the final episode of this rally begin to vary at a far greater frequency than its earlier portions. It is very difficult to even surmise what could have followed. Most accounts suggest that even Sardar could have escaped if the police who specifically targeted him. The Police pounced on him and unleashed their anger on him even before he was taken into custody. A few hours later he died. His corpse was buried on the sea shore in Valappad by the police.

This is just one version of the events forming a kind of a prism through which the life of sardar is represented. It was his decision to fight till the last that earned him the honour of a martyr. It was at a public meeting of the CPI at Kozhikkode towards the end of 1951 when his watch and pen were handed over to Jyoti Basu, senior leader of the CPI, that the Party immortalized his memory. Till then any mention about his death was suppressed. No one dared to talk about it and no one encouraged it either.

In the events following his death the firka and especially his home village Edathiruthy were exposed to police atrocities that took several months to subside. In the meanwhile the communist leadership of the state started reviewing their policy and in 1952 EMS Nambuthirippadu, in an important work entitled 'The Nationalist Question in Kerala', stated that it was not the programme of socialist revolution but catering to the nationalist and democratic aspirations of the people that proved the most potent force in the post-colonial countries after the World War II. The Communist Party

thenceforth revived the movement for *aikyakeralam* or a Unified Kerala, the seeds of which had been laid in the 1920 Nagpur session of the Congress- to organize their regional committees on the basis of regional languages. Their campaign now projected the ancient legend of *mahabali* the mythical king⁵¹ who is a paragon of sacrifice in the founding of legends of Kerala. The campaign also reached Nattika firka where it gathered significant overtones with the death of Sardar, now mourned as martyrdom, assuming new dimensions of meaning.

As signified in the representation of death articulated through the martyrdom/sacrifice of Sardar, these narratives hypothesize the image of a nationality in a dialogic form. This is its entry to another order of abstraction where the multitude of ideologies far surpasses the heteroglossia of Sardar's stories itself. Through the invocation of this idea it evokes a dialogue with all the national ideologies marking the cue or leaving the trace for a new discourse altogether. By the sheer coincidence of the First republic Day with the death of Sardar it excites tremendous force in its signification. This is not exactly a derivative of courage, bravery or any personal virtues or social values. On the contrary, it is a derivative of exactly the opposite of everything, which the society stood for. It is in the course of this tremendous

⁵¹ According to the *Vamanapurana*, *Bali* was the Lord of *asuras* (the heathen, who inhabited the underworld) who defeated the *devas* (the gods, who inhabited the heavens) in combat and held sway over the three worlds of heaven (*devalokam*), hell (*pathalam*) and the earth (*bhoomi*). Lord Vishnu, upon the request of the *devas* to redeem their lost kingdom, took incarnation as the *vamana* (the midget) and begged of *Bali* the charity for three feet of land. *Bali* offered the *vamana* to measure it with his own feet. Upon this the *vamana* grew monstrously big and in his two steps measured all of the three worlds over which *Bali* held sway and asked *Bali* where to place the third step. *Bali* obligingly offered the *vamana* his own head and the *vamana* placed his feet on top of *Bali's* head and pushed him into the underworld along with all the rest of the *asuras* who became dwellers of the underworld for eternity thenceforth. In Kerala *Bali* is celebrated as the *Mahabali* as an icon of the most generous, munificent and egalitarian ruler of its mythical past who returns from the underworld on the day of the festival *Onam* that is celebrated since time immemorial and celebrated today as the National festival of the entire community of Malayalis.

exercise that the consciousness, which inhabits it, spreads its tentacles for ordaining a new language of representation.

It is the novel in its structural form as a mourning for sardar that landmarked the arrival of this consciousness. But, the novel in itself on the other hand has dwelt itself on the strength of the theatrical effect produced in his mourning as we proceed to see.

The Novel Innaley

The novel Innaley is a work of fiction that is inspired by the life of Sardar. The essential fact the novel relies upon is the death of its protagonist on the first republic day of India, pitted within a chronicle of the national movement beginning with the “salt satyagraha” of 1931, the days of the World War II and ending with the first Republic Day of India. A storm that literally shook the lives of the people of Nattika firka (the setting for the novel) in the year 1942 has served as another potential source for the orientation of the story.

The death of the protagonist on the first Republic Day was a heroic death; which heroism seeks to consolidate its historicity through its coincidence with the first republic day of India thus transforming it into a martyrdom. Apart from these facts that form the part of the metanarrative, that unfolds at the level termed the national or the global, the novel indulges in the romantic tale of the sacrifice of the protagonist character, Gopi. The novel in this process gives essential clues regarding the ‘praxis’ of heroism and sacrifice in the region called nattika firka.

The historicity of the facts dealt with gives a certain amount of truthfulness to the story of the protagonist, Gopi. Even though, the character of Gopi has been created around the real-life story of Sardar, it is neither true that the

novel is a biography of Sardar; nor does the novelist make any claims to that end. The author's dedication of his novel to the memory of Sardar Gopalakrishnan and his prefatory comment regarding the fulfillment of his ambition to write a novel regarding certain important events of his countryside that he witnessed, reveal how important a book, the novel happens to be in understanding the congenital elements of a culture that edifies Sardar's heroism.

The novel engages with the life of Gopi as a boy, when he is a student of the tenth standard in a school run by Christian missionaries in his village. Gopi is not a brilliant or outstanding student. On the contrary, he is most of the time lost in his own world of imagination, addicted to playing games and snoozing off at the sight of his text books. Gopi's liking for games include a lot of dignity, affirmation and pride apart from fun and sports. His friend gets a taste of this while playing with him and others a freshly innovated game called, the salt and the police. The game naively inspired by the 'salt satyagraha' had the kids divided on either sides of a line, as police and the satyagrahis. The satyagrahis would grab at the salt, evading the police unless touched when they are detained and kept. When Gopi's turn came as a satyagrahi to plunge at the heap of sand that stood for salt, the boy enacting police, in the act of touching Gopi, not just touched him, but also scratched him severely on his back. Gopi reacted sharply, worrying little of the fact that he was a satyagrahi, banging the boy who played the police right on his head.

The author's imagination of the incident is indicative of the scant importance the 'salt satyagraha' had in the firka of Nattika. Of greater importance is the way children are used to portray characters that symbolize definitions of power in a revolutionary process of change. The boy who attacks Gopi as

police, is in reality a policeman's son and hence is jeered by the crowd watching the game. At this point, the game takes on the nature of a theatrical play and the policeman's son gets infuriated at the jeering and pounces on Gopi, and tries to kick him. This enrages Gopi, and for him too, the real play has begun, and he is a satyagrahi no more. This nuclear stage that evolves out of a children's game encapsulates a political vision of *nattika firka* of a time contemporary to the salt satyagraha of 1931. The metaphor that structures this vision in the novel is that of play or theater.

If theater is only incidental as a progressive theme, it makes a deliberate appearance at several other points in the novel. The drama staged for the festival in the temple gets its biggest applause for singing the "national" ; a song that is different from the usual bhajans, kirtans or other devotional songs and contains references to the national movement and praises for leaders like Gandhiji, Bhagat Singh etc. Singing of these songs was banned by the police and warranted arrest, if intercepted by them.

Theater, every time it makes its appearance, comes as an innovative social agency. Not merely does it provide a unified vision of social conflicts, but also provides a common ground for all sections of the society to coalesce. This latter event happens in an exemplary manner as featured in the novel when Gopi, as a volunteer of a team of scouts, in their attempt to rescue the lives of a Harijan couple that were drowning in the river bordering the temple, was carrying the couple to the steps of the temple to administer them first-aid, was stopped and forbidden to come near the temple because the drowning couple were outcasts and their admittance into the temple, would "pollute" the temple premises. This incident happens during the festival and realizing that even at the gravest hour of emergency, the doors of conservatism would not open for the lower castes, he walks out of the

scouts' camp, though he and his team successfully retrieved the couple from drowning. With this incident he also resolves in his mind that if he wants to be a scout, it will be only after these injustices are removed.

He comes out looking for his friend and soul-mate, Chandran. But, what he sees instead is the display board, for the drama that was to be staged that evening. It is a moment of illustrious contrast that the novel offers through this sequence of events. On the one hand, is the temple, that is considered sacred but is discriminatory and conservative, at its core. On the other hand, is the play, which is open, and accessible to everybody, only at the cost of a ticket. Not just that, the entertainment that is staged inside is, in the local slang, called the "national". For example, one of these songs begins with a verse that goes like this, "kanthi sonna manthiram", that means, the 'mantra' (or the magic word) that Gandhi spoke. Theatre here offers in an enigmatic way, the interminable confluence of the popular and the national, and becomes a chronotope',⁵² in the way it was meant by the literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin.

Gopi's tryst with history actually begins with that festival and the watching of the play. Even while watching the play, his mind was imagining scenes of the national movement that were unwinding within him, homologously, as did the scenes of the play 'satyavan savitri' on the stage. The novelist in fact, presents this as the moment of the formation of Gopi's political profile, when, the slogans and shouts of the freedom struggle that go in succession

⁵² According to Bakhtin, "A literary work's artistic unity in relationship to an actual reality is defined by its chronotope" (Bakhtin, M. 1994, p.243). Theater as the chronotope in this novel, presents to us the authorial vision over and above the individual vision and ideology presented through the multiplicity of his characters. Elsewhere in the main text we have already discussed how theater emerges as a dominant motif in the course of remembering events related to Sardar's martyrdom. Though the chronotope of theater the Author is essentially maintaining a continuity with that discourse that holds the martyr as a hero and the martyrdom as a stage.

like, “bharat matah ki jai”, “vande mathram” and “inquilab zindabad”, the last of which was completely unknown to him resonate in his ears. The novelist has used this incident to show Gopi’s intuitive maturity and association with the country’s most recent political trends. The matter of significance here is that, the author chose the context of a play, and it’s make-shift auditorium in order to narrate Gopi’s moment of self-revelation.

Thenceforth, Gopi’s life story according to the novel runs like this. K.Kelappan, eminent Gandhian and leader of the national movement in Kerala comes to Nattika village for a toddy shop picketing, where Gopi meets him and gets recruited as a volunteer for the satyagraha, marking his initiation into politics. What awaits him at the school, as a consequence, is his dismissal notice. At home things were even worse. Gopi, ever since his father died, which happened early in his childhood, was under the care of his elder brother, who was the manager of a school that ran on finances from the government. Gopi’s brother fearing that giving protection to a congress volunteer would jeopardize the Government’s interests in his school, wanted to end all relationships with Gopi. So, dividing the family assets in a way that he reckoned to be just, he had Gopi and his mother moved to a different house, and left to fend for themselves.

Gopi’s life ahead gets caught in solving the riddles of his relationships with the Nair; upper-caste family in the neighbourhood. The daughter of this family, Seema and Gopi, find a mutual liking for each other. Gopi had become a Gandhian by then. He takes up weaving thread on a “charka” as a trade to make his living. His mother weaves mats out of dry pineapple leaves to support them. It is at this point that the famous Guruvayur satyagraha is announced by K. Kelappan. Gopi resolves to visit Kelappan and does so by

covering all the distance from Nattika to Guruvayur, alone on foot, a distance of no less than 25 kilometres.

The novelist gives credit to Gopi, for having inspired Kelappan to enter a fast unto death till the temple is opened for people of all castes. Once heeding counsel from Gandhi, the fast is prematurely called off, Gopi turns skeptic about the intentions of the Congress party.

These questions assume a bigger dimension for Gopi subsequently, and infiltrates into his passion for Seema, the upper-caste girl. This drives him into extreme loneliness and insecurity. He thus flees his village. After a stretch of non-detailed wanderings, and voyages, his yearning for home breaks the ice, with memories of the blessings he had received as a child from Sree Narayana Guru, a spiritual reformer of Kerala in early 20th century, who while blessing Gopi, remarked about him as one capable of opening all doors. He comes back home to join the movement begun by the same Guru for social reform. But, even this engagement was not to last long. When the general elections came up, the Sree Narayan Sangham fielded their candidate. From his observation what Gopi concluded was that, the Sangham was only interested in the rich; and not the poor.

The congress candidate from that constituency wins the elections and goes on to become the minister in the newly formed ministry. When he comes to his village after his election, Gopi organizes a group of protesters to file a petition against the local sub-inspector of police for his excesses and bribe-taking. The public witnesses and evidences that the protesters produced, had its' effect, because the government had to force the officer concerned to undertake retirement. This episode earned for Gopi, a place in the local rowdy list (as the 13th) of the police.

In the same train of events, Gopi along with a friend, Velunni, who was also the secretary of the Congress in his village decided to organize a meeting of the farmers in their area. Originally, an idea mooted by Gopi, Velunni suggests that it should be coupled with a meeting of the unemployed and also of the harijans. The meeting raises the slogans of “inquilab zindabad”, following the exhortations of the incipient radical wing forming within the Congress represented in the meeting by A.K. Gopalan.

When in the year 1939, World War II broke out, people were pushed to extremes of penury and misery. Gopi lost his mother the previous summer. On the political front, the people are worried about a Japanese take-over, replacing the British. The only lucrative livelihood option open to the people, was to join the armed forces, though it involved danger and threat to life. On top of everything, came the monsoon with a storm of such fury that the village had never witnessed in the past. It came like death itself; uprooting trees and devastating people’s houses, shops and almost everything.

Like the theme of theater, the episode of the storm, is signified as a force that gravitates all the characters in the novel, towards a unique and exemplary kinship, that catapults human relations to an altogether utopian; but, nevertheless, real level. Rising to unequalled prominence is the character of the Moslem landlord of the village, Mayan, who appears at no other point in the novel. His mansion is the only shelter for the destitute villagers flocking like sheep in the face of the ghastly terror. Mayan’s wife Pathumma even assists as a mid-wife, a woman in labour, who delivers her baby in the midst of the storm.

The author tries to reflect an absolute and unswerving awe of nature, through the thoughts of one of the characters. It reads like, “yes, death is approaching. You can hear the roaring wind, nay, it is death itself trumpeting on the eardrums. The wind is beating and rising like, monstrous waves, one upon the other. You can hear its growl upon growl. And the whole world is trembling with fear”.

The storm excited the primordial fears of the characters, making a turn towards a communist humanism leveling all the existing inequalities in the society. This is similar to the egalitarianism devised for theater earlier, with the difference that, if the theater was enacted the storm was for real.

The misery and anarchy following the storm press people into looting a shipment of grains that was being transported through the canal bordering Nattika. Though the benefactors of this act, were mainly rich black-marketeers and not the poor, and the crime was an act of vandals, the police held Gopi responsible for the act. Gopi was in the fore front of the relief activities, and these circumstances added with Gopi’s name in the rowdy list of the police, gave the police the right opportunity to nail Gopi. The encounter with the police completes Gopi’s transformation into the revolutionary, the inner profile of which he already contained as a child.

When the ‘Quit India’ movement dawns in Nattika, it is welcomed with a huge zeal and a lot of sympathy for Gandhi. Gopi stands a lone dissenter to the campaigns of the Congress, when all his friends, including his lover extend full support to it. Gopi’s attention was still occupied with the rehabilitatory measures for the storm-victims and organizing anti-Japanese sentiments. The dissent, ends in a personal tragedy, that Gopi always feared in contemplation, is the marriage of his lover, Seema to one of his political

rivals and that too without her full consent. But, he realizes that the barriers of caste cannot be brought down, even if a couple of individuals decide to ignore them and cross them. Stricken with bitter grief Gopi decides to give an entirely new twist to his life and terminate the prolonging agony. He, thus reaches the recruitment office at Coimbatore (now, in Tamil Nadu) and joins the British Indian Army.

Gopi finds what he looks for, too. The letter that he writes to his friend and soul mate Chandran from the Army, expresses his gratification in having met different communities of people and interacted with them. He abhors the stupid inactivism of old days and resolves to be an entirely new man. He returns from the Army with a new set of political convictions. In 1946 May, when he returns from service in the Army, he believes himself to be a Communist.

1947 August 15. The day of Indian Independence. It came and left. But, Gopi still could not see any discernible changes in the condition of the poor. The misery of the farmers and the workers only accentuated in his village. The evacuation of small peasants, from their possessions continued. So did the excessive extortion of labour from landless labourers by the big landlords. Gopi and many others like Gopi who had returned from a stint with the armed forces started taking a special interest in the issues of these people. The local population interpreted their activity as “communism”. The leather bags and big moustaches they sported became, common insignia for the communists. They would make frequent trips to Kozhikkode, a town in Northern Kerala, the real intentions of which were unknown to the villagers. The long conversations, they initiated with the villagers were called in the local slang, a “study class”.

In the midst of these thick happenings, came the news that shocked , the news that shook all of India, Nattika being no exception. Gandhiji was shot dead. The news arrives on the day of a festival. The festival was related to the birthday of God Sree Subrahmanyan. The festival is called the 'pooyam'.

The central theme of theatre makes its appearance once again in the novel. There is a variety of entertainment that are waiting to be staged as a part of the festival celebrations. That evening when the news of Gandhi's assassination came, the stage for 'kathakali' was being set. A huge lamp has been lit and kept in front in the middle of the stage. The percussion inaugurating the act is playing in the background. The audience is eagerly awaiting the start of the play. It is at this juncture that the news of Gandhi's assassination breaks. The news spreads a lot of confusion and ambiguity and people are largely unwilling to believe the assassination of Gandhi. The ambiguity spreads to slow chaos and disorder. Some start clamouring for the stopping of the play. Others are pressing to continue not knowing whether the news could be true or false. Amidst this din, rises the voice of Gopi from, complete obscurity, calling upon his countrymen to mourn the death of the father of the Nation and requesting them to stop staging the play as a sign of respect to the departed leader. But, once the source of the voice was identified, the upper caste trustees of the temple questioned, what purport an Ezhava had in the temple, whatsoever. Upon this, Gopi affirming his basic faith in humanity retorted, neither Ezhava nor Nayar was of consequence, and that he was now addressing the trustees of the temple. That was enough to shut everybody's mouth and initiate the proceedings of mourning for Gandhi.

The theater as a coherent act of social conflicts inhering a vision of the future again makes its appearance with this episode in the novel. Theatre facilitates

the conveyance of a social message, that escapes the limits of everyday communicative rationality. It galvanizes different social roles to icons of performance. In the example above, Gopi's voice, is introduced as an *asareeri* or disembodied voice, which is a technique used in epics to divulge divine annunciations. It is an accomplished technique of the Indian stage too.

Life gets increasingly dangerous for Gopi in the meanwhile as the police and the volunteers of a special squad formed within the Congress start searching for Gopi and his friends who had gone underground, following the banning of the Communists by the Government. Gopi and his friends are called the "upsetteers" *attimarikkar* in the village, because they want, to upset the government, whereas Gopi believes it is his right to fight for demands like rise in wages or jobs for all.

The first day of the Republic dawns on January 26, 1950. Gopi and his friends take out a march to voice their demands in the public. The people are surprised and shocked at the same time. They fail to understand what was happening or how overnight things could change for the "upsetteers" of the underground. But, Gopi is confident because he believes he has the basic freedom to express his demands and share his views with the rest of the nation. But, before anyone gets an opportunity to speak or to interact, a police van disrupts the procession and Gopi and his friends are taken under arrest and carried to the police station. All that his people get to see of Gopi is his burial ground on the shore of the Valappadu coast of the sea.

The novel, which established a new form of representation, was also reciprocating to an already existing theatrical form of mourning, in bringing in theater at nodal points of story telling to introduce the new idea of nation. This form of identification with the theater as progressive force or presence

in the novel was not coincidental. It drew from the theatric effect the mourning rites for him on the anniversaries of his martyrdom had acquired. In fact the novel owes its writing also to the element of carnival already put in place through these occasions.

The Novel and the Carnival

A festive atmosphere in the form of a carnival marks the rites of commemoration organized in mourning Sardar's death on the January 26th of every year. The commemoration began only in 1952. The legal ban on the Communists continued till the year, 1952, in Malabar, Cochin and Travancore. Therefore there was no way the people could hold a procession in commemoration of the memory of their departed leader. The leadership of the Communist parties has remained an inalienable feature of all Sardar day commemorations so far. But even within the Communist parties there are divisions of various kinds. Right now, there are the celebrations of the same event by three different Communist parties. These are the CPI, the CPM and the CPI(ML).

The state of terror that reigned in the minds of the people, in the interim; 1950-52; was such that notwithstanding a profound sense of loss and lacuna in respect of his rites of cremation there was none to show the daring to overcome the pall of fear over the village and retrieve Sardar's corpse for cremation. In the event it turned out to be that his family conducted, it modestly but without his corpse, fearing another round of raids by the police who were any way hyper sensitive to any public gathering should the occasion turn violent. Hence there was little of any participation from outside his family on this occasion. The result of this repressed grief was that the first public commemoration of Sardar's death became also the

occasion for the uninhibited display of grief in loud wailing and crying in his mourning. This occasion was also joined in by members of his family as well as the rest of the village.

The first anniversary of his martyrdom almost went without any event. It was the second anniversary that was publicly commemorated in 1952 on the 26th January whence it became more than anything an occasion to cry. So many of them who participated in the procession on that day remember clearly how it began from the beach where Sardar's body was buried by the police as a communal mourning when everybody cried with the absolute feeling of unshackledness.

This was in contrast to the inhibition and fear with which the news of his death was received which had made an act of mourning seem impossible. So the first occasion, in the year 1952, when they were permitted to make the sense of their loss loud and clear they did so. In the anniversary that year Sardar's family was joined in commemorations not merely by his relatives but almost the entire village especially the lower caste and peasant women of the firka. The commemoration soon proceeded from wailing to laughing and merry making, it became one of the rare occasions when the women and children of the households got a chance to get out of their homes. Thus it continued to be in the years to come. With programs that would keep them awake late into the night the people would go prepared for a Rabelaisian holiday with folded mats in their hands for the family to rest as the programs lasted late into the night. The cultural fete invariably hosted several shows like kathaprasangom⁵³, dramas, orchestras, singing etc.

⁵³ A Form of story-telling set to songs and music.

The strains of carnival, a term employed by the literary critic Maikhail Bakhtin in his study of the literary genre in the works of the pre-Renaissance novelists; Rabelais and Boccaccio can be identified in these festivities mourning his death. Though the carnival as a time of celebration is associated with the different feasts of the Catholic Church, the fact that Kerala had a long history of contact with Christianity makes it relevant as an approach in understanding the social dynamic of these commemorations as well.

In retrospect, this presence of a spirit of the carnival laid an unshakable foundation for the commemoration of the anniversaries of his martyrdom. Mourning of his death gradually became a celebration of the new freedoms that arrived with the separate statehood. It transformed into an event which ascertained the joy in living. From its beginning it also retained the nature of a celebration in which everyone could participate equally without a discrimination of any kind. The early years of these celebrations evoke such nostalgia that its memory as such occupies a carnivalesque space in the every day lives of the people.

Bakhtin looks at carnival as “grotesque realism” that represents the unofficial ideology against the official ideology rigorously maintained by the church. The carnival is an encompassing view of the world, the totality of which is obtained through experience and participation in the carnival. It was only in subsequent times, that the spirit of the carnival found its way into literature, into the novels of Boccaccio and Rabelais thus preparing the stage for the entry of the Renaissance consciousness.

The inspiring motif of these works, as Bakhtin understood them, was laughter, especially the victory of laughter over fear. “All that was terrifying

becomes grotesque” (Bakhtin,1981: 209) is how he describes it.Carnival celebrations which were in large numbers in the Middle ages,were also linked externally (officially) to the feasts of the Church, in commemoration of various patron saints.

The comic spirit of the carnivals was contained in writings especially intended for the carnivals and different acts of mime and farces in which the monk, the clergy, or the scholar participated beside ordinary folk. The writings-in both Latin and the vernacular- included parodical liturgies, parodical gospel readings, parodies of the most sacred prayers, etc.

Occurring under a unique legalized carnival licentiousness, they always resulted in creating ambivalent symbols and images that were representative of a new means of communication. It subverted spirituality and sublimeness by thrusting the human body into focus. The body was presented not in a private, egotistic form severed from the other spheres of life, but as something universal, representing all the people. Bakhtin says, “manifestations of this life refer not to the isolated, biological man, not to the isolated private, egotistic economic man, but to the collective, ancestral body of all the people” (ibid: 105).

The arrival of the modern State has offered great resistance to the continuation of these carnivals in Europe. In 1855 the Great Donnybrook Fair of Dublin was abolished and the same year Saint Bartholomiew’s Fair was also abolished in London after the London Mission Society petitioned for its suppression. In the decade following the Fairs Act of 1871, over 700 fairs, mops and wakes were abolished in England. By the 1880s, the Paris Carnival was being transformed into a trade show cum civil/military parade (White (in) Armstrong and Tennerhouse (Ed.), 1989).There are several

more instances like these that can be cited from the history of Europe. The rising bourgeois State was on a collision course with the celebrations of the carnival kind in it's interest of compactly conserving the middle class-capitalist hegemony.

In the context in which the mourning for sardar can be claimed to constitute itself as a carnival in Nattika firka it has to be also specified that there is implicit to it a re-enactment of the confrontation of the police and the volunteers of the CPI on the 26th January 1950, in the form of a carnival. The ideological backdrop to the mourning is provided by this event played out in imagination. In 1950 on the day of the formation of the Republic, a demonstration was carried out against the local police in the firka. The demonstrators were citizens of the new Republic who were denied their basic freedoms ensured by the Republic. These Citizens, in the process of being declared outlaws by the police were forming themselves into a carnivalesque band of revelers, who on the particular day of the 26th of January, were enacting an act of the political grotesque in the eyes of the police. The police were yet unprepared to understand the freshly released charges and exhortations to liberty; a long cherished dream in the minds of the Citizens, which found its way out through the vibrant cultural idioms of the country. The police but mistook such a carnival and celebration on the Republic day to be a threat to its own authority to confirmation and hegemony. Thus, the police perceived a contradiction in the sheer spectacle of the celebration of the first Republic Day by the demonstrators led by sardar upon which it reacted violently and thus succumbed to the contradiction taking the life of a citizen who was only part of several others, in fact a whole country that asserted a pledge to freedom and equality in the eyes of law. In the firka of Nattika, the celebration of the Republic Day has

henceforth assumed the character of a medieval carnival, that is externally or officially linked to the State in the form of an expiatory rite to mourn the death of one of its citizens who by way of atonement by the Indian state has been canonized as the first martyr of the Indian Republic, Sardar Gopalakrishnan.

To conclude then, it can be seen that when the novel inaugurated heteroglossia as a form of mourning it actually drew from carnival as an existing form of mourning. Both these forms were mutually complementary and found a concrete expression of such complementarity in the writing of a novel that virtually lived on the carnivalesque presence of theater to build its narrative.

CHAPTER 7

MOURNING AS THEATER OF CRUELTY

In this and the following chapter I will be looking at forms in which a theater of cruelty is represented in mourning Sardar's death, linking it to the forms in which historically terror has been practised in Kerala. Before entering into its discussion a mythic space of cruelty has to be mentioned. I call it a mythic space of cruelty in speaking of cultures where "the space of death is important in the creation of meaning and consciousness.....where torture is endemic and where the culture of terror flourishes' (Taussig: 1986: 4).

The historic descriptions of the emergence of this may be seen in the forms of archaic punishment meted out to the transgressors of the native forms of law sanctioned by the caste system in Kerala. Tying the criminal's legs to two elephants and make them walk in opposite direction, thus splitting his body in halves is one of the ways described by P. Sankunni Menon in his *History of Travancore* (1878). Another instance quoted from Paulino Bartholomew (*Voyage to East Indies: 1791*) talks about the hanging of a lower caste Channar in public. The offence he committed was stealing three coconuts from the household of a higher caste Nayar. His corpse was left for public view, with the three coconuts hanging round his neck. In another instance Dr. Francis Day (*Land of the Perumals: 1863*) talks about a most gruesome way of killing. This involved thrusting an iron rod through the anus of the convict in such a way that without killing him it pierces his body and emerges behind his neck. The rod is then tied to a wooden pole thrust into the ground and the convict is left half-hanging on to the rod with his feet barely touching the ground. Thus left to the mercy of the insects and flies

pestering his wounds and of nature (if it rains, he dies faster owing to infection) he dies helplessly without being able to help himself to even a drink of water (Balakrishnan: 1997: 156-159).

The scenario of sardar's death also brings out similar images of torture and pain in custody after his capture. The brutal pinching of his moustache in which it was plucked hair by hair is told to every novice being newly introduced into the mourning of his death. Questions abound as to the cause of his death but the cruelty in treating his corpse which was left to the vermin has become folklore. Such narratives have lurking within them also questions raised by the new laws of the land that seek to exorcise the spirit of Sardar or seek expiation from the guilt of his murder. Will these laws reinstate the courage in the minds of the people so that the martyr will be resurrected to make a second coming of Biblical scenes? Will such a faith in the law erase the state of terror from the minds of the people and help them rejoin the milling crowds on the evening of the January 26th before an illuminated Presidential arcade at Delhi, scene of celebrations in the capital? Will it grind the perch of localism locked inside these memories to shreds that a new generation be born free of such fear?

The intensity of these contradictions betray a genuine characterization of the martyr and deny him any of the pitfalls common to ordinary human beings that could lead to the cause of his death and instead concludes with its valorization. The mythic space of cruelty yet probes the subconscious depths of meaning locked away within a valorized perception of death harbingering different responses to the questions sealed within his martyrdom. They emerge in an ingeniously fashioned ambiguity- both ideological and emotional- of the history of the Communist movement in India that touched its zenith on the occasion of the Republic Day. An ambiguity arising from

the uncertainty faced by the Communist movement in India as to the stance that was to be taken towards the Indian Republic, an ambiguity that led to a non-erasable trace of memory living within the confines of the sixteen villages of the firka which is annually reenacted in the form of a mourning. From the depths of silence in mourning emerged a myth that refuses to look straight in the face of death and does not want to know the reasons why sardar or for that matter anyone should die on that particular day in that particular way. It is now a 'sacred history' (Eliade (ed.)1987).

There is an absolute contradiction in the way the mythic region constitutes itself against the power of the state. This contradiction comes about through its decentredness with respect to the centredness of the state. In order to situate the the historic nature of this contradiction one needs to locate his death within the socio-political transformations that happened in Kerala in the last century and a quarter, taking as its departure point the remark made by Swami Vivekananda, when he visited the place in 1892, that the society of Kerala is a mad house owing to the blatant and outrageous way it practiced untouchability (Nossiter:1988:49) to the inauguration of the first democratically elected Communist Government in 1957.

Kerala's particular cultural 'lunacy' extended the concept of pollution from touch to sight. The lowly Pulaya must remain not less than 96 feet from the Brahmin, 64 feet from a Nair and 30 feet from an Ezhava..... (ibid:49). This myth of cruelty that is built around the mourning of sardar has a fundamental function of resolving a contradiction between the redefinition of caste based social disparity by the Indian Constitution which reinterpreted the social chasm existing in India through abolition of the practice of

untouchability⁵⁴ as one of distinction based on equality and inequality in place of the one into touchability and untouchability⁵⁵.

The national and social movements in Nattika took inspiration from the demand for the abolition of caste; the most vociferous of which was the Sree Narayana movement. Gandhi in raising the slogan for the abolition of untouchability had given it a significant and symbolic nation-wide appeal, although it did not imply a rejection of the caste system as such. In its reflection in the movements in Kerala, especially with the firka of Nattika in focus, the slogan raised by Gandhi became one of the most important rallying point for the nationalists, socialists and communists alike. The landless peasants, from the lowest castes that I acquainted in the course of the field-work, invariably identified themselves as Harijans, the epithet by which Gandhi was the first to address them. Another very good example of the force of this movement against the practice of untouchability may be seen in the Guruvayur Satyagraha of 1936 which became one of the most important meeting points for leaders from all walks of political opinion. Congressmen like K.Kelappan and pioneering Communists like A.K.Gopalan were in the leadership of the Satyagraha. Interestingly enough,

⁵⁴ The Constitution of India says, according to Article 15, on the 'Prohibition of Discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth', that "(1) The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them. (2) No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them, be subject to any disability, liability, restriction or condition with regard to access to shops, public restaurants, hotels and places of public entertainment; or (b) the use of wells, tanks, bathing ghats, roads and places of public resort maintained wholly or partly out of State funds or dedicated to the use of the general public".

⁵⁵ Nossiter.T.J.(1988:49), quotes a British journalist (Zinkin:1962:152), to show the change in social perspective; the very ordering of the sight of people belonging to different castes in public places, that the democratic changes had brought about in the state following the formation of the Communist Government in Kerala, in 1957. It runs thus, "Paul (a wealthy Christian) stopped to curse, his handsome face turning a slow red. 'You saw that fellow. He did not get off the path for us.....Of course, we have done away with unseeability a long time ago and that's only right. But until six months ago that fellow knew his place; when he saw me he would get off the path; today he nearly brushed me aside.That is what they call equality.....'".

when the first elections to the Parliament took place in 1952, they were again on the same side with Kelappan having broken away from the Congress movement and joined the Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party founded by Acharya Kripalani, in the wake of Gandhi's death and the Congress Party's deviance from the ideals of Gandhism (Balakrishnan:1998:224).

The point that we arrive at is that, the question of untouchability as a question of justice, had occupied a pride of place amongst the consciousness raised by the national and social movements in Kerala. In Nattika also it was the same. In the novel *Innaleey* written in memory of Sardar, narrating his life in the form of a novel, the novelist places the Guruvayur Satyagraha in focus, by making it the occasion for Gopi's (the character styled after Sardar) initiation into politics.

In the village of Edathiruthy the management of land was so distributed that the Nair *adhiyari* of the village was also the highest revenue and judicial power recognized by the colonial Government. This title for generations lay with the *Blahayil* Nairs. When a movement for re-distribution of land, began (that found success in stages- Malabar *Kudiyani* Act,1930 and The Kerala Land Reforms Act, 1963) it was targeted mainly at the land interests of the big land- owners. This becomes evident from the trail the growth of national and social movements have taken in the village. The two major forces that opposed the growth of these movements, that at times took the form of movement against caste- discrimination, were the Nair and the Christian landlords. The same trail tells us that even after Independence, towards the 1948-50s, when the peasant movement was at its strongest and the Communists had taken over the leadership of the movement it was almost unilaterally directed against the institution of the *adhiyari* who continued to represent a colonial form of authority in the village. That the collusion of the

Police Inspector of the firka with the adhikari against the Communists and the untouchables were reported time and again during the course of field work by various respondents goes to prove this.

The Nair taravadu discussed earlier in connection with the land relationships in the village, a unique phenomenon of many a village in Malabar as shown by Dilip Menon (1994) was true of the village of Edathiruthy as well. We also discussed the ceremony of *koithoottu* one of the annual festivities by which the taravadu sustained its hegemony in the village. It was this hegemony that became the target of the Communists in the leadership in bringing down the zamindari system.

The spread of modern education amongst the lower castes, particularly the Ezhava, was already opening different opportunities before them when it was that the age –old form of discrimination based on the caste system was being sought to be put back into practice by the police. The number of indiscriminate police raids and the proliferation of a culture of terror, all allegedly at the behest of the landlords, against the landless peasants and the Ezhava small land-holders bear testimony to this fact of the reinstitution of the most reactionary and brutal face of caste oppression- untouchability.

The extreme forms of demarcation of social spaces for the isolation of castes as was earlier practised in Kerala gave weight to the new forms of cruelty unleashed by the police. It reprised such an objectification of the public as well as the private sphere where human beings had lost all ability to subjectivity. The intelligible structures of understanding in such a society separated both men and women with a high precision in signification of can be touched/cannot be touched. This division and the harsh objectivity it invited on the society prepared the foreground for a re-enactment of the

severe forms of cruelty and torture as punishments to taboo early pre-modern society of Kerala is recorded to have practised.

The social chaos that arose out of these developments in 1948-50, was brought to its dramatic end with the sacrifice of Sardar and the abolition of the taboo of touchability/untouchability. Memories of his death gradually embodied themselves in the form of a sacrifice that offered a passage from the distinction of men into the touchable and the untouchable based on the norms of caste hierarchy into another form of distinction that of equality/inequality based on the principles of the new Consitution of India. The image of the victim in containing the preceding universe of power served simultaneously as a barrier and a conduit of exchange for associations with the past. This image thus aroused a distinctively mythematic presentation of Sardar's martyrdom in the earlier days. The way his body has been mythologized in the short story *pena paranja katha* has been already pointed out earlier.

The mythic space of cruelty situated around this conception of the body as a meta signifier invokes fatalistic tropes immanent to traditional wisdom to see how sardar's proverbial death was a self-nemesis of sorts. The following is an account given to me by Ravi who as a teenager knew Sardar closely. He had his teenage budding dreams at that time of winning the whole firka's acclaim by becoming the first martyr of the communists. The fact that this dream was something he shared with another person he was late to discover. The incident he reported happened one night in the late 1940s before the ban came on the CPI. He was camping in the office of The Beedi Workers Union

in Kattur⁵⁶ a village neighbouring Edathiruthy with sardar and another comrade. The three of them kept awake late into the night discussing several problems related to their organization especially ways to raise funds to help the workers laid off from a tile factory in North Malabar. The workers were in dire straits and did not know how to make a living. The Communists had taken over the responsibility of their starving families and decided to collect money for their benefit. It was as a part of that campaign that he, in the company of Sardar and friends, reached the office that day. The discussions went late into the night and upon finishing all the rest left for their respective nestling places and only three of them- Sardar, himself and the other comrade (name or whereabouts unknown) remained. He went to sleep in the early hour of morning but sardar and the other comrade kept awake and continued the discussions. In the meanwhile he had this dream- the dream of his becoming the first martyr of the Communists from Nattika and woke up shouting his own name aloud as the first martyr of Nattika. Sardar, he recalled, listened to it with a very familiar sense of humor and chided him saying *poda chekkaavante oru swapnam....nattika firkayile aadyathe rakthasaakshi.....athu njaan thanne aayirikkum* , (“you kid, will you shut up! the first martyr is only going to be me and be done with your innocent dreams”). But he believed till his last day, in a strain of fatalism, how those words proved to be Sardar’s nemesis which he expressed in the Malayalam proverb *aram pattuka*. The proverb stands for self-invoked nemesis that ominously conveys the death of a tragic hero. The proverb in the form of a

⁵⁶ The Beedi Workers’ Union office in Kattur was remembered by him as a unique example of the cultural symbiosis that existed between the people of Malabar, who since 1792 were under the Colonial administration, prior to that under Tippu Sultan and even prior to that the Zamorin’s rule, and in 1948-52, the period of our study, a part of the Centrally administered district of Madras province and the native state of Cochin which had a king of its own. This was so because, the villages of Edathiruthy and Kattoor had a joint Beedi Workers’ Union, when the idea of a unified state of Kerala was still a distant dream and no signs of a linguistic reorganization of the states in the Union yet on the cards.

fatalistic trope singularly covers the entire narrative of the life of the hero in its intricate and cruel design of events.

To conclude this chapter, it was the mythic space of cruelty that linked the mourning to a sense of the present and as we proceed to see in the next chapter, created a theater of cruelty in transporting the memories of a chaotic stage of the firka's past to the present through some critical personalities who were associated with those times.

CHAPTER 8

LIMITS OF MOURNING AND ITS CLOSURE OF REPRESENTATION

In this chapter I shall elaborate some more of the questions raised in the previous chapter like, why does it challenge and at the same time accept the Indian Republic, why does it move beyond the politics of martyrdom that the Communist movement has espoused for it yet seeks accommodation within the same, redefined as a mark of ethnic expression and most of all why does it seek a closure within the same trail of representation in which it was conceived?

Needless to say it is a most demanding task to tread a path of its political implications merely on the strength of the data I have so far generated. This is so because the issues staked in these representations refer to humanity in such a way that a much broader canvas is called for. This chapter therefore tries to illuminate the velocity with which concepts tend to gravitate around these representations because the implication here is of ritual as performance and mourning. I have used the works of Derrida to understand the way these concepts can be employed in the social sciences.

History as Sorcery

My intention in talking about the mythic form in which cruelty is represented in mourning (previous chapter) was to take it closer to its points of divergence and convergence with positive forms of historicity. In the field I saw it emerge in the form of what is generally understood by the word fate or destiny particularly with respect to the death of sardar and with the lives of at least a few that knew him. Even then it was not in the sense it -fate- is represented in traditional ways of mourning that it appeared here. Hence I

have used the concept of theater of cruelty from the dramatist Antonin Artaud to explain it. For this discourse which is centered around a murder, certain forms of its speech assume the form of sorcery. This perhaps stretches back in the collective memory of the firka to the time and episode when the resolutions of the Calcutta thesis of 1948 were first announced by the party in the village corners as sorcerer's speech *velichapadu tullal*. I take my cue from an analysis of what this means as a representative category according to Michael Taussig, before proceeding to see how it is linked to the notion of fate in the context of this study.

In the initial few chapters of this book we saw that a totality is desired in the representations of death built around sardar. Another interesting aspect of this form of mourning which we are currently going to see is related to how it reveals the gaping holes in a form of consciousness that can be termed historic. This historicism is a product of the Left movement which in its emergence to a dominant ideological position over the years has raised many questions, answers for which have been difficult to find. Moreover in its commitment to a philosophy of historical materialism which is quite well understood amongst the cadres of the Firka, the Left has not delivered ample description of changing forms of technology and life styles in the Firka. Ravi's unpublished work titled 'Materialism in Computer Age' is a criticism of this state of affairs. He tries to update the philosophy of materialism with the help of his own understanding of Marxism to come to challenging conclusions about the way feudalism continues to reign in the name of technological progress. He points out how the virus invented by the computers has the potentials to destroy entire nations and the exponents of this technology are silent about it. His conclusion that existing regimes of power have been strengthened with the introduction of computer is a pointer

to the direction in which progress as it is defined in the firka could be headed.

I looked at his work as an echo of the thoughts shared amongst a lot of others in the Firka and the amazing hold materialism as an atheistic philosophy has among the educated and experienced opinion makers of the region. A lot of new literature in Marxism is entering their discussions. His commitment to Marxism as a philosophy was so singular that it made his perceptions acute. He could effortlessly point to changes catching up with traditional ways of life and offer a critique of them. Although not a believer he lived amongst the thick of them. He had particularly sharp criticism of the practices of worship turning into a trade. Such observations strengthened his own convictions as a materialist. Till his last before succumbing to a cancer, he held fast on to his views. Before his death he had also made sure that he will be buried and not set to flames as was the new practice catching up with the Ezhava in the Firka.

It is not just difficult but is impossible to conceptualize the lives of certain people. Ravi certainly was one of them. A theater person called Kazhimbram Vijayan who was close friend of his, I have been told had often remarked to him that although as a script writer he played with the minds of people, Ravi always presented him with a dilemma. His personality was admitted to be so complex that Vijayan could never hope to understand.

Though a generation younger to him by age, during my field work Ravi had shown amazing adaptability to someone so very junior to him. In this kindness of age shown towards me I began to understand him better. I began to see him as one among the several others from the Communist movement of 1948-52 the time of which saw the greatest turbulence for the movement

in the Firka and who were scattered at different points. He even took me to visit a couple of his acquaintances from those days that made things clearer to me as to where he located himself. Although he spoke the language of Marxism and materialism I had to resort to alternate means of understanding the way he related to the Firka. From the evidence he himself disclosed of how as a child he used to be regarded as gifted with soothsaying powers interested me to no end. That is when I started to explore in his language a form of the sorcerer's speech discussed by Michael Taussig. Taussig had called it a theater of cruelty which form of theater has been addressed as a closure of representation by Derrida also.

But such a form of representation is also a structured realm seen from the perspective of the phenomenon of mourning. For example individuals like Ravi cannot be approached as exceptions but only as part of a few handful like him who can be studied only as part of a scattered group of veterans who in their lives had early and fatal encounter with the Left movement that changed their lives.

I built my understanding of them merely on the strength of what they represented to the Firka. Although highly respected in the Firka the general attitude towards them spoke of a certain emotional ambivalence. Ravi himself was introduced to me as a "jack of all trades but master of none" by one of his sympathetic contemporaries. Not everyone was so sympathetic either.

Ravi's thought that Marxism or knowledge of historical materialism made him special was not shared by the rest. For them he was an anarchist, for certain others a naxal, yet others even a gambler. In short the descriptions were too complex to be narrowed down to anyone in particular.

Sankaran from Kaipamangalom was the other extreme of this perception. He had had little of education nor any schooling in Marxist philosophy but is very well renowned as a veteran of the Communist movement. Yet he is also marked by a general attitude of ambivalence by which he is reported to be afflicted by dementia.

The fact that for Ravi or for Sankaran their years of experience with Communism had contributed little by way of improving their material circumstances also set them as odd examples for the staple identity of the workers in the movement who tended to rise up the ladders of power.

Hence this unnameable group of persons if at all they could be so named was only in that the firka seek in them a form of the sorcerer's speech in the context of mourning for Sardar. Such speech could be often seen to border on a closure of representation in its symbolism that invokes a form of fatalism as a form of historic consciousness. As a motley assemblage of veterans of the Communist movement in the firka they have got dispersed from the movement at various points of time and are living under relative anonymity in the present (some of them also have recently passed away due to old age or other reasons including slow damage to body sustained from torture in the lock-up). They are also 'living martyrs' in the context of mourning because of the way they are represented in the press marking anniversaries of sardar's martyrdom. It is in respect of sharing their memories through the martyrdom souvenirs which is a process of collective healing for the Firka similar to the one in sorcery or shamanism that I have used the title 'history as sorcery' for this section.

A reading of their biographies put together from various sources in the firka revealed a facet of the firka psyche that immortalizes itself or at least seeks

to do so by making use of them as repositories of information about the chaotic and anarchic stages of its past. The studied seclusion of such people from the social and political mainstream and its legitimization in the name of psychological illness, alcoholism, anarchism etc., allows for a clinical approach to the idea of mourning and its representation as an entity detached from its past. They are often deemed not capable of bringing harm to the dominant form of representation and in their social interactions are also often patronized by the Left in the case of the worst and poorest off ones even being given charity in the form of perks for tea, snacks and beedi. The goodwill or the charity that it represents is limited in that it is non-reciprocal and even more so because nobody ever talks to them not the least about their 'political' and 'troubled' pasts.

If this is the perception in which a philosophy of historical materialism preserves memories and creates its martyrs then it will be interesting to see what is the generally assumed consensus on the veterans. Being removed from engaging in any income-generating activity due to injuries sustained from police torture they are outside the restricted economy of accumulation. Often as objects of charity and repositories of wisdom, the complicit fatalism with which historical materialism has redrawn their characters have transformed them into 'the accursed share' (Bataille: 1991) within the general economy of the *firka* and its iconography as a land of sacrifice since the days of the Communist movement and the death of sardar.

In the restricted economy of the village that is involved with the process of production for accumulation they do not have a role and are often thought of as situated outside of it. But their political consciousness as citizens who have participated in one of the intense political struggles of the region could not be taken for granted by the people. So the ideals they stood for are often

also besieged by references to mental illness or paralysis if not anarchism and alcoholism, rendering those ideals invalid in the face of an ideology that is perpetrated in the form of truth ordering the sphere of accumulation.

Being witnesses to the death of sardar or having participated in the rally that took sardar's life or having shared with him their political convictions when he was alive they come to represent an archetype which is of the sorcerer or the shaman who holds clues to the riddles of a community's past locked away in oblivion resurfacing with the potentials or possibility of bringing anarchism, social disorder or psychic illnesses in their wake. But the inviolable space of wisdom and sovereignty enjoyed by them within their family as well as community characteristic of a sorcerer because of their experiences gained from participating in the most intensive periods of change known to them represent them as also 'living martyrs' from the past.

Anthropological literature though often engaged with sorcerers as an enigmatic and elusive group of persons seldom looked into the historic nature of their representations through speech, writing or any other form. Paul Radin has at least gone to the extent of observing that the class of sorcerers and priests have a psychopathological origin (Eliade:1964:26). Evans-Pritchard has noted how the British-Egyptian administrators of Sudan, chose the priests or the 'leopard-skin sorcerers' of the Nuer as their representatives and chiefs in the villages of interior Sudan (Evans-Pritchard:1956).

It is Michael Taussig's treatise on shamanism which, in a sort of way, evaluates sorcery as a form of representation that can be made use also in historic analyses. Taussig for example analyses the incompatibility of the colonizing –missionizing Christianity as a belief system with that of the

Indians and the resistance of the Shamans in getting absorbed into the colonizing mould. He cites many a missionary's report or journal to show how they recognized in the shamans the primary threat to the colonizing Spaniards. Taussig (1987) gives anthropology a new perspective in applying the central/cardinal concepts of theater of cruelty for the study of the Putumayo shamanism and their yage nights or exorcism rituals of shamanic flights and trances.

In Taussig's treatment of the language of shamanic representation as the language of Artaud's theater of cruelty we can find a nature of representation associated with mourning that is invoked specifically in its attribution to a group of veterans I earlier mentioned. The theater of cruelty breaks open the conventions of language and the signifying function of signs through its chaotic mingling of danger and humour, liberating signs that brings us ever closer to a chaos. This chaos has to be interpreted as fate in order to understand the way mourning for Sardar has featured the outlines of lives of these individuals in a representation institutionalized by the murder of a citizen by the state. It was to what he called "an infinite conflict of perspectives" that this theater of cruelty was directed.

Mourning the death of sardar in the case of these survivors of the police raids in the villages of the *firka* and neighbourhood amount to prophecies to the people on the immediacy of an anarchic past that lacked all the order and certainty that rule their lives today but from which they gratifyingly derive the current order of their lives. In bringing back the picture of necessity and rigour that life fundamentally demands they succeed and they also hold the key to the most elusive representations of sardar's death linking it back to the heart of nature ever closer to chaos and to fate indeed to open up an infinite conflict of perspectives according to Artaud (ibid: 442).

Though their memories are recounted in a form which is often given to the journalists from the Communist party newspapers who visit them almost regularly on the eve of the martyrdom day for publication of the martyrdom souvenirs in these newspapers they represent in the paradigm of mourning the aura or the idea of politics as theater, as a necessity, as a form of cruelty as thematized by Antonin Artaud.

According to the popular forms of representation they represented the end of all information, that it should be special. “You will not get any information out of him. You better not waste your time”, was one of the repeated statements that both Narayani and her daughter kept giving me, in the beginning when I went to meet Sankaran her husband at their house. His wife, Narayani was often using the pronoun “it”, in most places instead of “him”, when it came to occasions like these.

Such fatalism with which certain individuals lives were marked are better captured in the following words of Ravi who wrote this letter to me while the research was in progress. It is an excerpt from a monograph on the social history of Manappuram part of which has been already cited in earlier chapters. His observations on the current state of mourning sardar’s death as martyrdom reads as follows.

A month after the martyrdom of Sardar, in Edappilly in a Communist hunt by the police, at least half a dozen people were killed and a lot many ‘disappeared’ according to the police versions. The decision of the revolutionary parties to not even sustain the memory of them; and their same resolve to commemorate Sardar’s martyrdom in Manappuram will make any neutral sane mind think. But, considering the psyche of Manappuram there is little to be surprised about that. Because here what has always counted is to ascertain one’s own position and ranking in society. Thus, one can see many a

character who had no acquaintance with Sardar, pretending to be his comrade his relative and thus covering oneself in vanity.

Here we must observe words of a respected Communist leader of Kerala who tried to boast about the doings of Sardar, that, he (Sardar) deservedly manhandled Inspector Govindan Nambiar.

This leader was not concerned about, the heightened self-dedication in leading the people, a mark of non-erasable humanity, with which Sardar fought against the riotous run of the police in this land. Then, what is surprising about martyrs losing relevance and being disclaimed over the course of time?

Here in this manappuram there is not much history to be spoken of any encouragement, help or co-operation to gifted and special minds to evolve their talents in better arts of appreciating truth. This land has produced many such people who have made their own imprints in the fields of art and literature over periods of time. But, all of that, they have claimed from their own independent effort. There are many such talents who never had the ability or the circumstances that mattered and thus gradually vanished into the shifts of time. I myself can remember many names beginning with the singer Aattakkoya. What to speak of the script wrights, actors, dancers, literatures. etc!

Then the memories of a comrade who sacrificed his life for this land, should not meet with the fate of the comrades who were forgotten in Edappilly. But, in the growing circumstances, cannot one see the proliferation of a culture of selfishness? It has to be examined properly.

Anyhow, I end these thoughts here; keeping my ears sharpened for hearing about more experiences.

These thoughts that were communicated to me through a letter written as an answer to the many queries with which I approached him initially when I began my work. Sathish and Nawaz (see the whole draft of this letter in the appendix) whose names are also mentioned in this letter along with mine were very close

to Ravi in whom they also saw their mentor. In the several meetings I had with Ravi the thoughts expressed in the letter were frequently raised. We-including Nawaz and Satheesh- had our natal ties with the Firka and shared an affiliation with the Communist movement in the country at some point or the other. Ravi (*ravi chettan*) was the most experienced and was looked up to not merely by Nawaz and Satheesh who were also his neighbours but by occasional visitors from the media and the radical Left organizations who came to report on either nostalgia or the ideological direction in which he is headed. His last work apart from a collection of short stories and dramas which have been already published, which is yet to come out in print on the question of materialism in a computer age (cited earlier) gave us lot of things to discuss about in the course of doing my field work. His experiences with the different phases of the communist movement in the country was widely appreciated by all sections of the Left although with old age and several years spent in underground he had become a faint resemblance of his earlier past according to several of those who knew him. The fact that he had participated in the demonstrations of the 'Anti-Betrayal Day' organized by the CPI in Bombay on the 26th of January 1950 and had seen a comrade die on the street never went on to be commemorated as the first martyr of the Communists in the Republic of India was often brought up by him to illustrate how the Communist movement has not always fulfilled its commitment to people who staked their lives for it and has been drawn into cult of populism. The incident which occurred on the day of the January 26th during the 70s in the Emergency era has been already discussed earlier to show the irreverence with which he has treated such populist machinations by any Left party.

This letter summarizes the themes I have been trying to focus on. The use of fatalistic imagery (despite his commitment to the philosophy of historical

materialism) to open critical insights into the past as well as the rigour with which the necessity of change is expressed brings us to the closing theme of this chapter which is that of the limits of mourning and closure of representation in death. It is Derrida who observes that Antonin Artaud's notion of the theater of cruelty stands for the closure of representation. The point when the rigour and necessity of life, shuts out all impulses of mimetic desire, that forms the foundation of society, its stamp-bearer, and the grammatical rules of language as representation loses its communicative relevance; that is the point when a discourse of this nature arises. Why such a discourse serves the role of bringing the immediacy of fate to its subjects can be understood from the words of Artaud.

Theater of cruelty according to Artaud, ".....means a theater difficult and cruel for myself first of all. And on the level of performance, it is not the cruelty we can exercise upon each other by hacking at each other's bodies, carving up our personal anatomies.....but the much more terrible and necessary cruelty which things can exercise against us. We are not free. And the sky can still fall on our heads. And the theater has been created to teach us that first of all" (Stoller (in) Taylor:1994:88).

Derrida evaluates the theater of cruelty also to have a historic function. It points to a certain kind of historicity that lies at the bottom of these representations. This historicity is not a positive historicity as in judging the epochal transformations in the process of a teleological progress. It is better to understand the meaning of the term from the historicity implied in the concept of the theater of cruelty itself. Derrida evaluates why Artaud's theater of cruelty has the value of a historic question. "A historic question not because it could be inscribed within what is called the history of theater, not because it would be epoch-making within the becoming of theatrical

forms, or because it would occupy a position within the succession of models of theatrical representation. This question is historic in an absolute and radical sense. It announces the limit of representation” (Derrida:1978:233-234). Derrida thus locates the historicity of the theater of cruelty outside the conventional norms of representation the essential form of which is language. Such historicity can thus reach back to the pre-literate stages of human civilization.

“Thus we can distinguish the sense of cruelty as necessity and rigor. Artaud certainly invites us to think only of “rigor, implacable intention and decision,” and of “irreversible and absolute determination”, of “determinism,” “submission to necessity”, etc., under the heading of cruelty, and not necessarily of “sadism,” “horror” “bloodshed” “crucified enemies”, etc..... Nevertheless, there is always a murder at the origin of cruelty, of the necessity named cruelty. And, first of all, a parricide..... In the theater as we conceive it, the text is everything. The absence of an author and his text does not abandon the stage to dereliction..... It seems indeed that where simplicity and order reign, there can be no theater nor drama, and the true theater, like poetry as well, though by other means, is born out of a kind of organized anarchy ”(ibid: 239).

According to Derrida, what Artaud invites us to participate in is the limits of true representation itself and hence the end of theater itself as a form of spectacle. In these forms of mourning as cited in Ravi’s letter there is a bold confrontation with fate that it takes us which form is comparable to that of the theater of cruelty. According to Derridas reading of it, it is an alternate vision of totality as opposed to the ritualized enactment of theater. The moment of its arrival is announced through this bold prestation of fate or the closure of representation that the theater of cruelty makes to the spectator

who thus becomes the other of this closure of representation. In the mourning of Sardar the marks of torture on the body of the victim for the sacrifice; the curse of death that fatally marked the martyr as the victim that followed him as his nemesis are such gifts, the counter prestations to which gifts are unknown.

The only way in which they could be known is by secret because it is closed to representation. A secret though disseminated in various forms as betrayal, lie or deceit by friends, family and party have all distinct role to play in his mourning but only as secret and therefore closed to representation. In this respect it is the version of the police itself that will be most illustrative because according to them the very fact of his murder is an undisclosed secret.

Derrida (1995) elsewhere writes about secret- as a logical category of collective thought-that it is what every ritual contains as its other. The ritualistic mourning of sardar's death reaches a point of closure in its representation because of the nature of a secret which it contains as its elusive other. The secret as Derrida observes, "never allows itself to be captured or covered over by the relation to the other, by being-with or by any form of "social bond". Even if it makes them possible, it does not answer to them, it is what does not answer. No responsiveness. Shall we call this death? Death dealt? Death dealing? I see no reason not to call that life, existence, trace. And it is not the contrary" (Derrida:1995:..31).

The ritualistic form that divides the representation-in-mourning of his death into the dualism of sacrifice and martyrdom ensure the omnipresence of this secret in the stories of his death. A ritual is omnipresent and omnipotent to such an extent that, "There is ritual everywhere. Without it, there would be

no society, no institutions, no history. Anyone can specialize in the analysis of rituals; it is not therefore a speciality” (ibid:3).

Mourning the death of Sardar has formed its own representations to define itself through customs or ceremonies associated with it as a ritual. These representations- as distinct totalities of the phenomenon of death- remain loyal to specific codes of mourning. In their communication within themselves they refer to their proximity to the passion underlying his death in ways that are essential to the perpetuation of these representations in their own ways. If one of them would speak about the kinds of torture to which Sardar was put by the police, the other would talk about the ways in which any reports of his death were hushed by even his comrades for some time after his death⁵⁷. One would talk about the pains or suffering he withstood in his struggle against the police while the other would talk about the transparency in which he saw the rest of the Communist leadership and walked towards his nemesis fully aware of it. Both the theories provide canonical affiliation to the respective axes of political and ethnic virtues that orientate them. The representations can shift in their narrative from martyrdom to sacrifice or vice versa as to suit the specific allegiance to either of the social groups that its exponents can bind their commonality with. This is contingent and can be fluctuated according to the need of the moment. If in identification with the CPI(M), it could be espoused that Sardar’s sacrifice was due to a betrayal, in allegiance to the CPI it could be linked to the

⁵⁷ Ravi in a short story reveals how he and another comrade were chided by the local leadership of the CPI, for raising a red flag on Sardar’s grave on the first anniversary of his death, calling their act an act of stupidity, though adventurous, given the legal ban that continued on the CPI. It was in the year 1952, when the Party was veering towards a policy of parliamentary struggle, and in Malabar, they were preparing for the elections to the District Board of Malabar, and the provincial legislature of Madras, that the death of Sardar was retrieved from oblivion to derive a mimetic representation of his death as heroic and a momentary apotheosis granted to him as a martyr along with the Communist Party that was 'legalized'.

symbol of progress and the ideal of dedication that Sardar provided to the ranks. The conclusion which following Derrida one can drive is, is that we cannot “describe or objectify the programmed development of a ritual, still less of a sacrificial offering”(ibid:23).

If it is in the nature of a ritual to contain also a secret within which one could hypothesize as its other and not given to representation what meaning could one derive from it ? Following Derrida one could say, “it would not be a matter of an artistic or technical secret reserved for someone - or for several, such as style, ruse, the signature of talent or the mark of a genius, the know-how that is thought to be incommunicable, untransmittable, unteachable, inimitable. It would not even be a matter of that psycho-physical secret, the art hidden in the depths of the human soul, of which Kant speaks in connection with the transcendental schematism, and of the imagination.....it would not be a question of a secret as a representation dissimulated by a conscious subject, nor, moreover, of the content of an unconscious representation, some secret mysterious motive that the moralist or the psychoanalyst might have the skill to detect, or, as they say, to de-mystify. This secret would not be even of the order of absolute subjectivity, in the rather unorthodox sense, with respect to a history of metaphysics, that Kierkegaard gave to existence and to all that resists the concept or frustrates the system, especially the Hegelian dialectic. This secret would not belong to any of the stages (aesthetic, ethical, religious a or b) that Kierkegaard distinguishes. It would be neither sacred nor profane.”(ibid:24-25). The secret belongs “no more to the private than to the public” and, “No more than religion, can philosophy, morality, politics, or the law accept the unconditional respect of this secret”(ibid:25).

Yet, the narrative possibilities of this secret are unlimited. “One can stop and examine a secret, make it say things, make out that there is something when there is not. One can lie, cheat, seduce by making use of it. One can play with the secret as with a simulacrum, with a lure or yet another strategy. One can cite it as an impregnable resource. One can try in this way to secure for oneself a phantasmatic power over others. That happens every day. But this very simulacrum still bears witness to a possibility which exceeds it.....The secret never allows itself to be captured or covered over by the relation to the other, by being-with or by any form of “social bond”. Even if it makes them possible, it does not answer to them, it is what does not answer..... even if one precisely cannot here trust any definite witness, nor even any guaranteed value to bearing witness, or, to put it another way, as the name suggests, to the history of any martyrdom. For one will never reconcile the value of a testimony with that of knowledge or of certainty-it is impossible and it ought not to be done. One will never reduce the one to the other-it is impossible and it ought not to be done.

That remains, according to me, the absolute solitude of a passion without martyrdom.”(ibid:30)

These thoughts on the nature of passion as something that is always known only in secret brings one back to a consideration of the ways in which Sardar is mourned. The two main contenders to appropriate the secrets of his death in mourning are those of sacrifice and martyrdom. In their mutual contention to align forces of signification the death of Sardar shrouds itself in a mystic lure of passion sustaining by itself the charms of the unknown and continue to attract newer and newer generations into seeking the “truth” and “revelations” about his death. There are ever new testimonies that appear time and again regarding the ‘true’ nature of his death. The representations

can never be content with the number of these testimonies or so it seems. Such a mystery was constructed in concretizing the mourning for the martyr and immortalizing his memories as mythical and commemorations ritualistic. The apparent nonchalance with which a democratic state treated the death of one of its citizens gave rise to a discourse of such power that a mourning of his death immortalized him through collective, abstract and impersonal representations. In its representative function the discourse of mourning assigns to the state, the role of the other, the scrutinizing, moralizing agency of God and for society the role of the subject. The death of the martyr is taken as the death of a victim like in a sacrifice. But for this representation of the Republic day to function a despicable scheme of treachery and connivance has to also bind itself forbiddingly as a secret on the iconism of the martyr, that allows for an inexhaustible discourse that seeks to preserve the veracity or genuineness of the murder of a citizen as a sacrifice. It retains this objectivity through maintaining to itself this secrecy that is generic to ritual in its conceptualization. The secret then through its omnipresence in the collective representations of Sardar's death explains the objectivity of its status as a ritual.

Before I conclude this chapter there is one more question of my data that has to be discussed which is that of sexuality in respect to his murder or untimely death. It is often taken as the passion in his death, importance of which representation as a secret cannot be undervalued. Many say, it was the reason for Sardar's untimely death. His relationships with women is a scandalous aspect, on one side (promiscuity) and incestuous(a sexual relationship with one of his own family/clan) on the other. The scandalized perspective ties it with martyrdom as a theory of his death and the incestuous one ties it with sacrifice. In either case there is no independent evaluation of

his relationships with women. Very often it is even linked with heroism. This is unmistakable and true. The credibility of having made progenies in illicit relationships is a general theme of heroism that the Communists' underground movement has generated in Kerala.

There are no proofs or documents of factual value that can be ascribed to this theme. But nonetheless the prevalence of such stories is undeniable. So is true with Sardar as well. One of his claims to 'greatness' is the illegitimate children that he fathered despite his banishment from public life. This is certainly an accentuated mark of masculinity that one garners from the narratives. But at its opposite end femininity is no better than a betrayal either.

Kochupennu, an elderly woman with a cherished remembrance of the memories from a vigorous resistance against power and domination, was often castigated in the talks as a mid-wife not 'legally trained' and hence attracting a lot of reprobation and rebuke in the utterance of the very name and considered a woman of rather loose morals. Women like Kochupennu were difficult to find from Edathiruthy village and it was hardly surprising why. She fought the elections as early as 1952, when the Communists decided to participate in the parliamentary democracy. She lost. The reasons would be not far to seek, she being an uneducated lower caste woman and on top of that with the reputation of having assisted illegitimate child birth (allegedly called for in cases of illegitimate pregnancies). The Communists' shift of policy (to contest elections) would help her little in terms of gaining respectability in the face of such castigating talk.

The general norm of sexuality was defined within the kinship relations of alliance and incest prohibition. Other forms of sexual relationships were not

accepted in the village. The matriarchal alliance group prevailed amongst the Nayers as a community allowing for polyandry that necessarily escaped the exchange patterns among the rest of the communities. They in turn allowed for their own rules of marriage and alliances⁵⁸, in general accepting the hegemony of the Nairs in the village, until that was seriously challenged by the Communists. Within this space of community relations the space for a reciprocal relationship of the sexes that was opened by the radicalization of perspectives of development served to sabotage the local genius of sex. In fact the local genius of sexuality was one of the first and primary losses in the formation of the underground by the Communists for political activism. It led to the formation of an essential in-breeding that was extremely chauvinistic. It has retained an undeniable presence in the language of both Communist eulogization and parodization in the later and more recent days.

The persona of Sardar is a good example in this light. It is often cited in relation to the extreme or the border; transgressing which the event would invite the same fate that befell Sardar. Velayudhan who spoke of Sardar concluded thus, “what if all of a man’s bodily needs were taken care ofwhy should he marry ,have a family or be a part of the rest”. Proceeding from here are the inklings of an isolated persona which would feature its end in the most tragic way expiating for the sins it had invited in its departure from the normal.

The martyrdom and sacrifice both look at the martyr’s sexuality in a surrogate light that there is a specific “inducement” to talk about it. Foucault (1990) discusses the incitement to discourse that Catholic civilizations have

⁵⁸ See foot-note on the *talikettu*, the marriage ceremony for girls of the Nair community. To continue with the husband obtained through the ceremony was optional. If the girl so desired she could choose another man as her husband. The Nairs also allowed for nuptial union outside of marriage with Nambuthiri men, a practice called *sambandham* (Kumari ,1984).

ascribed to sexuality from the seventeenth century onward. In the instance of both these representations-as sacrifice and as martyrdom- this proposition holds true. The specific inducement to discourse is a part of the mythology that seeks to glorify and further rationalize the martyrdom of Sardar. What evolves from this sequence of narrativity –of a martyrdom (glorification),its subsequent rationalization(the sacrifice theory),is a subdued realm of sexuality that is subdued with the same intent of earning the right to discourse.

The closure of representation, with a discussion of which I began this chapter to conclude then has to be seen as the conceptual debunking of a mode of thought (mostly; binary) that is often thought of as introduced into the firka of Nattika from April of 1948 onwards till the beginning of 1952, when the police unleashed a witch hunt on the communists. But the movement of the Communists to the underground but exposed them to limits of the dialectical philosophy in which the Communists situated their world. The arena for operations, for instance, would take a radical shift from the public gaze of the street corner to the kitchen yards and attics of the poorest households. This was not something anyone was prepared for. The shift would reflect with similar impact on the Communists as much as the villagers at large that the drawing of any borderlines was impossible. The sign potentials of this shift would be so huge that it would carry with it an imaginative world of mythical proportions into the future that it would have to be told and retold in order to make life possible henceforth, and here lies the relevance of the closure of representation in these stories, that preceded the rites of mourning which in any case was institutionalized in 1952, following the legalization of the Communist Party by the Indian Government.

The true prognosis of representation, or the limits of mourning then lies in its closure. It is this closure that points to the intensity, rigour and necessity of life that is not open to choices but ruled by destiny as in death. The world of mourning through its extensive and apparently inexhaustible wealth of resources has sought to bring every human life into the realm of representations. But a political culture centred around the idea of the state that is formed and transformed through them seek to contain them within set parameters of virtues and vices dictated by the norms of the self ever occupied with representing truth to oneself. The closure of representation then opens its doors to a nothingness and then on to a carnivalesque play of chances and indeed to fate that directs the course of human life in its different trajectories of time.

CONCLUSION

In coming to the conclusion of this book I would like to open it up to a theme which has been touched upon elsewhere only marginally, which is to situate Sardar's murder in the context of the dominant forms of violence and power in which it is commonly represented. The period 1948-52 had seen a number of incidents of clashes of the communists with the police in various places of the yet-to-be-born state of Kerala ranging from Punnapra and Vayalar in South to Onchiyam, Korom and Thillenkery in the north. This had resulted in deaths of many a Communist and an individual inquiry into everyone of them could tell us more about the politics of martyrdom dealt within here. Notwithstanding the fact that the situation as it stands now allows us to see these deaths only from perspective of martyrdom, especially in the cause of a Communist revolution as it was the avowed aim of the party in those days. But in historicizing these deaths, of which the instance dealt with here is exceptional because it reveals the shades of the communist experiments with democracy in stark ways. It is into the intricacies of this representation, of what or how it expresses itself as democratic that we are led into in coming to a conclusion of this study.

The representations of Sardar's death portray its actors in such prototypical forms of displaying power and violence that when the rally led by Sardar was confronted by the police, with the Inspector of Police in charge by some design⁵⁹ it was Sardar who was destined to be the only one to remain to fight the police till the last. The end was pre-meditated in these accounts as if violence was only a means to expedite it.

⁵⁹ The reference here is to incidents of widespread arrests of the leaders of the Party from all over the *firka* that left *sardar* as the only one outside prison.

The absolute forms in which power and violence⁶⁰ appear before them renders the mourning, in itself an act of democratic representation to give greater transparency to the characters that make the lives of people memorable in a democratic country⁶¹. There is an increasing dehumanization of power and violence and its concentration within an ordered rational realm of structures that is far removed from the ritual context in which the concepts originally assumed their performative meaning.

Its progression towards a form in which truth is represented seems to derive from these extremes. Violence appears in its extreme form, as one against all, and likewise, power too appears in its extreme form, of all- which is the police representing the state- against one. Within these extremes they can then be made mutually inclusive as well as mutually exclusive to fit varying degrees of presence to suggest in a democratic sort of way that if violence implies resistance, then resistance also implies power.

It is in a mutual complementarity of the two conceptualizations –of power and violence- that the democratic discourse of the Indian Constitution marks its written presence in the Firka. Death is made to appear incidental though omnipresent and omnipotent. It can come in many ways; more than one. It

⁶⁰ Also relevant to the present context is what Hannah Arendt wrote about violence. “The extreme form of power is All against One, the extreme form of violence is One against All.....Moreover, nothing, as we shall see, is more common than the combination of violence and power, nothing less frequent than to find them in their pure and therefore extreme form” (Hannah Arendt 1970: 47).

⁶¹ Rene Girard (1988) contextualizes violence not in the disastrous dimensions of the modern arsenal of weaponry developed by the industrialized nations as their final means of conflict resolution but in its generative dimensions. Violence necessarily roots itself as a primordial signifying force and hence arrives pre-eminently at the scene of every ritual and forms the basis of community formation.

As an example here may be noted the ritual significance and hence meaningful import the Tupinamba Indians of northwest Brazil gave to war. Amongst these tribes a perpetual agreement reigned not to agree so that a permanent state of war was maintained. The express purpose was the provision of victims for ritual cannibalism and the number of captives on either side had to be more or less equal in order to constitute a more or less reciprocal exchange (Girard, 1988 :278-279).

structures the chaotic variance of life with death at the species level of the human beings and redefines the life of an individual as a citizen, a new destiny and hence his biography- the time period of his life, the historic, sociological and the cultural milieu that binds a narrative. It reflects light on India as a country of heroisms, a country which practices and cherishes the ideals of democracy where the chaotic variance with which life and death encounter each other has been more often than not structured into tales of heroism. The discursive form of this power which structures such lives does not do so with distinguished lives alone. This is one basic point that appears clearly from our understanding of the phenomenon of mourning. Every narrative that emerges out of this chaos does so with the distinctive stamp of heroism that is peculiar to her/himself. This form of a representation is that which binds on the individual the power of a democratic discourse intended to celebrate the idea of the citizen although its function is that of mourning.

In the relentless pursuit of sustaining itself this discourse represents a chaos that works through structures of the individual and the collective. The collective which spawns a secret and the individual which dispels the secret through distinctively tragic narratives of pain and individuation.

The collective and the individual are two ways of representing the chaos. An instance of death heightened to the multiple levels of representation as seen in the mourning for his martyrdom/ sacrifice, or as seen in the heteroglossia of individual lives defined within the paradigmatic backdrop of dialogic imagination is a pointer to the extremes or limits of structuring chaos. The sustainability of this discourse depends on the force with which chaos is narrativized. This vibrancy or various forms of this force is read as destiny and death and thus lauded as its ability to relate to the politics of nationhood.

Through its multitudinous ways of mourning it is defining and redefining this nationhood at the distinctive stages of its growth and development.

This chaos does not enter into books of history, nonetheless retains a specific genre of historicity. Such a form of historicity which is the product of a ritualistic sovereignty that gives the concept of nationhood meaning in excess of its domain of representation. It is in the form of a signifier enriched by the meaning of ritualistic sovereignty that it enters an order of abstraction pertinent to the narratives of the lives of the people in the Nattika firka. The guarantor –role of the martyr/victim that binds the signifier of Nationhood with its informing idea of democracy in a ritualistic way is expected to secure sovereignty and social equality in terms of opportunity that lives through these representations- both collective and individual. The terms confined to the pages of the Constitution assume the truth of their signifying power in these representations-in-mourning.

The mourning is also bound within the works of an image of a victim for a heroic sacrifice without whom the chaos would be lost to a utilitarian ethic of appropriating collective spaces for meeting the demand of possessive individualism. Through the cultic nature of its commemorating martyrdom as the heyday of communist revolution and celebrating the ideal of sovereignty as subjective sovereignty dispersed through a polyphony of heroic voices it cultivates the discourse of nationhood in the firka.

At this level it also conceals the potentials of the same discourse to move towards an insensitivity abjuring the ideological roots of the other; thus confining the idea of the individual and the nation within the private realm of his/ her own private desires restricted through the specific intent of progressive accumulation of wealth. It verifies as true that but for the pre-

eminence of the ritualistic collectivized way of mourning, a secret can take its place (the death of Sardar being an unproven fact according to the law). As a secret the legally unproven nature of Sardar's death can give a supranatural and phantasmic power for the mourning subject, an individual citizen. Mourning as a democratic discourse therefore seeks cover from the fact that a secret can occupy overwhelmingly the space assigned for the multifaceted representation of democratic nationhood that the heteroglossia or the collective genre of representation like the magical, mythical or theatrical.

Here it uses the markers of the accumulative logic of the capitalist economy and the way it has made its presence. The spot of the martyr's burial today is thus an amusement park in the making. It is a favorite spot for videographers who film the newly married against the scenic back drop of the sea and coconut groves. It is the site of nostalgic return through family albums. It is a location for the shooting of a film, a Tamil one bearing the title, 'Rajasthan' with sets having not even the remotest resemblance to the ritualistically structured piaculum into which it transforms on the *Sardar Dinam*. The mourning here as a democratic discourse articulates the ritual of martyrdom as rising coherently at one pole, and the secret desire of accumulation proliferating at the other pole, little aware of the memories related to mourning that lay embedded in the place that they want to possess in order to sell. It pits the conspicuous individual consumption of the private citizen, as opposed to ritualistic profitless consumption of a community.

A sign of cosmopolitanism is one of the binding rules of these representations. The stories narrating the death of Sardar have this essential nature. All the stories are ruled by a persistent degree of chaos that alone gives his martyrdom a "truer" secular and democratic tone that is distinct

from other deaths due to political clashes in the region. Although his death is an unproven fact legally, the overwhelming legitimacy that the Communist movement enjoys in the social history of the place has ensured that this fact as a symbolic motif is not exploited by the politicians of the Right. But here Right can only be taken to mean the combination of parties trying to revive 'Hindutva' as a political ideology like the BJP, for instance. For all other purposes the discourse as such is not exclusive to the Left or the Right because its representative axis is a thing that covers all ideologies of the nation.

What makes the different strains of this chaos discernible is the essential cognitive primacy of it that also includes the event(s) of his death. The cognitive primacy to these events assumes that the events narrated in relation to the death of Sardar exist in a comprehensive frame of relationships by which every event relates to the next and gets consumed in the process. The portrayal of a section of the leadership as defectors from the rally of the Communists' on the 26th of January 1950 thus does not stop with the Firka but extends to their engagements with the political and social life of the people elsewhere in the State and though beyond the judgement of the vantage point gained by the natives of Firka through Sardar's martyrdom is in fact judged to be true or false. They are no more today and even if they were alive their voices on his death will not amount to a testimony. Their or for that matter anyone's innocence or guilt with regard to the responsibility for his death is taken for granted by the cognitive primacy of his death as resulting from democratic representation as a form of truth.

The same goes for the two living witnesses to Sardar's death in police custody. This is so, because every account of his life, becomes a short piece on the social history of the place, fulfilled in and by itself with the meta-

narratives of nationalism, socialism, communism, or any other 'ism', as ideologies of progress, reform and enlightenment and most important of all, the meta-narrative of the Indian judiciary as self-engaged that given the nature of its representation no one would want to take a retrospective interest in it, comprehend and further apprehend, the event within the judiciary's definition of legality and illegality.

The non-verifiability of his non-existence in the Firka through non-judicial means as a fact has structured the chaotic space around it into a discourse that separates truth from false in a manner similar to the Indian judiciary. This chaos turned into a singular narrative consummates itself through representing death as a form of heroism in Sardar. The mention of Sardar's name excites ideas of death simultaneous with a joyful urge to narrative that spins off from an axis of "overdetermination" adjudicated by the finiteness of death. My dialogues with Sankaran, were very good examples of this. "Sardar,Sardar used to come here, sleep over there (pointing to the attic)....stayed here hiding from the police, many times"; Sankaran's references have no objective value. The house he is talking about, is long lost to him and his family. But, for Sankaran, talking about Sardar is like everything has remained the same; a return to joy and youthfulness. This narrative of death is in fact a transgression⁶² of death, or

⁶² Georges Bataille (1993) classifies the realm of prohibitions on human behaviour or the realm of rules divides their objects into three areas- those concerning human dejecta, sexuality and death. Accordingly, there are prescribed manner of regulating human behaviour with regard to the three areas in all cultures. The avoidance of filth (concepts of purity and impurity), of incestuous union (concepts of kindred and allied or us and them), of taking life (concepts of self and other) are the concomitant variations of the prohibitions (ibid:61-79). It is in this realm of prohibitions that the concept of transgression assumes meaning. A festival is such an occasion where all prohibitions are transgressed, a moment for unleashing the animality lying repressed within human beings (ibid:89). All cultures had its festivals. In primitive cultures, the festivals provided occasions of ritual licence where all fears instilled by the horror of death shall be overcome in a sovereign way, that the "excess consecrates and completes an order of things based on rules" (ibid:90). It is in this primordial form of transgression that we locate the genre of the narratives compiled on the death of Gopalakrishnan.

the fear of death which gets lured into a peculiar genre of heroism that is articulated as a specific genre of democratic articulation.

This chaos though apparently far from the genre of constitutional democracy with its popular assemblies with elected representatives nonetheless gets itself enlisted in the process. The grief as it quietly displays in mourning on the Republic day which is meant to be a day of celebrations has turned out to be a remarkable sign of this by sheer coincidence.

So there is enough in it to feast for those who believe that the commemoration of the martyrdom of Sardar is a prop to the growth of a democratic- revolutionary politics of development in Kerala. This is what the proponents of the Communists would want everyone to believe; that the memories of the death of Sardar as reaffirmed every year through the rituals commemorating his martyrdom endorses an act of political representation- that of the progressive path of development adopted by the Communists, ever since their coming to power in the state, through parliamentary or electoral politics of representation through legislation.

They take the chaotic content of this fact for granted in going with the valorized idealism with which they have covered the death of Sardar. Going by the novel written in his memory this chaos that ritually mourns the events of his death seeks a universal element in its expression that proceeds from the heart of nature. This may be seen in its association with the storm of the year 1942 (*patinarile vellappokkam*). As revealed through the novel and also through versions of several other respondents the chaotic phase of their lives were opened up by the floods of 1942 where all the existing structure of society was levelled and the casteist or religious boundaries were transgressed in the overwhelming play of violence unleashed by nature.

Therefore, the idea that the martyrdom or sacrifice which is an ideological or cultural construction in mourning death is only a mirror reflection of the chaos that entered their lives in the form of the storm⁶³. The representation of the storm significantly comes up more in the narratives of the heteroglossia than in the ritualistic mourning of his death. As for the mourners the resemblance of political chaos to that of a storm provides an abiding historicity as powerful as a storm in the 'true' political event that resulted in sardar's martyrdom.

The accuracy with which such a chaos captures the events historically forms the stem of Sardars heroism. The accounts of it even by those who have never been to Mathilakom village on the crucial day of 26th January, 1950 or witnessed the confrontation that took place in its streets share this form of a historicity created in the power of representation of a democratic form of protest as this account which I recreated merely from hearsay can prove.

The rally of the Communists that began from a sympathizer's house in Perinjanom village, had at least 12-14 students mostly from the Perinjanom, High School, who had no fore-boding about the outcome of the rally. But once it entered the main road (eventually National Highway 17) the curiosity and anxiety of the villagers from the side walk shop windows and small junctions changed the entire hue of the rally. It now rose to a crescendo and touched its zenith upon nearing the police out-post at Mathilakom. Sardar was in the lead and Mohammad Younus, his comrade brought up the rear of a 52 strong rally that moved in two lines.

⁶³ Coming in the thick of National and Social movements in 1942, and as reported in many an account during field-work, it was a turning point in the lives of the villagers, that took them to the very brink of existence. At the analytical level, the secret pertains to a realm from where the narratives emerge. The unifying realm that forms the playground for the different narratives of the death. It is this aspect that we proceed to examine further down.

Near the mosque situated at the junction in Mathilakom the procession met a company of policemen marching towards them. The company was not numerically as strong as the rally itself. The Inspector of Police was in command. They were camping in the Police out-post and were not anticipating any confrontation of the kind that they witnessed later. They were unprepared and were not carrying bullets for their guns.

With the police marching towards them the volunteers felt the gravity of the situation. The people also started crowding around the rally curious to see what happens. Nobody had the faintest idea what was about to happen, still they were drawn into it like filings to a magnet. What drew them in is irrelevant. But the emptiness of feeling and an absolute state of consciousness when thinking becomes clearer than seeing; it transformed the happenings before the crowd into an event which through the prism of consciousness maintains its colors through its brilliant shattering across generations. With the words *nokkikkoda* (look out), it was Sardar who split this nothingness and began his fight with the policemen, and those words stood out in the spectatorial silence of a tragic drama, that unfolded, making the dumbfounded crowd a mere audience. No one from the Firka was to see any more of him after this incident.

His last words, an invocation to sight that marked him as the victim but was made into a representative form of power and violence within a democratic form of articulation, were immortalized later literally in the transformation into the theatrical and carnivalesque representation of mourning that the memory of his death brought every year.

But the collective forms of representation that emerged out of chaos gradually substituted the chaos with a ritual. The violence with which he met

his death drew its life in representation from the role of violence in ritual which according to Girard (1988:80-85), is collective and generative, binds the play of the ritual in its compactness and gives it the generative force necessary for the sustainability of the sacred and the continuance of the communion that partakes of the ritual in the form of various institutions-religious or secular. It is generative and its aim is not sustainability. The latter may be obtained through acts such as charity or benevolence. But the instance of violence alone can reach out to the realm of the sacred through the slaughter of the surrogate victim because the energy released in the instance of sacrifice far exceeds charitable oblations of any kind (Hubert and Mauss:1964: 12) . From all the accounts of the clash with the police during the rally that took his life, the aspect of violence stands singularly apart to signify the depth of energy released in his killing, transforming Communism as an ideology into a ritualistic praxis marking the affirmation of a notion of ritualistic sovereignty, bound by a legal sovereignty declared through the Constitution of India on the same day.

The different roles of Sardar as a school teacher, political activist, caring uncle, loving brother, brother-in-law, romantic who loved books, and who set up a library in his home village by collecting money from not just the local villagers, but from immigrant workers in Ceylon from in and around the *firka* are all effaced in the instance of his murder in its popular recollection and are, with a certain unanimity substituted as the surrogate victim.

That brings me to the conclusion of this study of the deification, through death and mourning, of the critical actors on the stage of Indias democratic society on the Republic day in Nattika *firka* and the ways in which their representations are articulated in discourses of power and truth, by enacting

them not merely as written charts to be published and read by everyone, but also by grafting on to such letters, dissent in the form of transgressions which complete the rules by breaking them.

Post- Script

“One should never speak of the assassination of a man as a figure, not even an exemplary figure in the logic of an emblem, a rhetoric of the flag or of martyrdom. A man’s life as unique as his death, will always be more than a paradigm and something other than a symbol”

- Derrida, on the assassination of Chris Hani, leader of the
Communist party of South Africa (1994:3).

Although I started out to do a social anthropological study of Communism as an ideology and Democracy as a way of life and the way they are culturally defined through practices like mourning, any discussion on the topic of death raises more questions than it answers. This is inherent to the very problem of death itself. Because it always represents itself in excesses. In religious thought death represents at once a transgression of reality (in the soul’s departure from this world) and a confirmation of reality (in the funeral rites that bind the erstwhile community of the dead man/woman in this world) (Hertz:1960). It is the same pattern that we find etched in the democratic discourses. But, in democratic discourses, the mourning rituals assume an intriguing aura altogether, that involves it with secular discourses. This was my point of emphasis and also my point of inquiry.

As a post- script to this book I want to reopen a discussion from where it took its most important point of departure. This was in giving to mourning the function of commemorating, representing an actual murder that took place in an ahistoric time as initially observed by Freud (see Chapter2-

Social Anthropology of Death). But it was the structural approach of Hubert and Mauss that helped me historicize it. Added to it were the forms of novel and theater that strengthened the collective nature of this mourning thus rendering my approach more justified.

But the study of collective representations, of which rituals of sacrifice formed the basis for Hubert and Mauss, did not include any role for a mourner of the victim. They did not find it necessary to think what followed the scene of a sacrifice. It was in this respect that I brought in Freud who always attached a commemorative function and that too of an actual murder to all sacrifices. Mourning the victim of an actual assault was at the root of all rituals according to him.

So a broader approach had to be summoned for in order to make the structure of this mourning studied as a ritual. This had to be taken from Georges Bataille who suggested that from an approach of how society represents death one has to arrive at a juncture where one can examine how society reacts to death. Its mourning practices-as assembled in the present case in the form of anniversaries, stage, performances, novels, short stories etc-assume a ritualistic form insofar as they form reactions to a phenomenon of death. At this level they are inspired by a certain aversion to the idea of death amongst human beings, of a kind similar to that evoked with sex and dejecta or excrement. Overcoming the phenomenon of decay that follows death is the universal element of all mourning practices. As Bataille observes "the prohibitions concerning death have two aspects: the first forbids murder and the second limits contact with corpses" (Bataille:1993:79). It is a fallout of these prohibitions that I argue that the rites of mourning arose in the first place.

The images of singular heroism and courage, all symbolic of the limits of freedom and sovereignty that Sardar was infused with as a victim was no lesser than that of a God on the day of his murder. This representation retains an aura of mysticism which is doubled in its effect by the absolute and irretrievable loss of the corpse of Sardar. The total prohibition of entry to the realm of pollution caused by his death imposed a radical separation in the practice of traditional mourning in the firka.

The power of such appropriation was derived from the newly enacted Constitution of the Republic which was drafted and accepted on the strength of its representative character. Death that was opened for discursive activity continued to be a presence in the Firka for all these years in variously articulating and demonstrating and all this while continuing to claim to represent the truth in incontrovertibly democratic ways. The totality sought by the mourners in representing the death of Sardar and the different ways of mourning are testimonies to this. The tone and tenor of this discourse was created by that of a state acting in a democratic way of representation. But, God is the imperative that was created in the murder of Sardar by police on the Republic day. Ever since the script of the play in this act of democracy seem to follow the dictum "seduction, power, sovereignty are necessary to the self-that-dies: one must be a God in order to die" (Bataille:1993 :71).

But for Bataille death also means chaos, to the point of revealing the absence of chaos, that of life that opens itself up to death, that of self that grows until it reaches the pure and hostile imperative of being formulated "die like a dog" or to put it in other words, "there is no longer a God in "inaccessible death" (Bataille:1993:71). It is with this critique of mourning, of death as a democratic discourse that I end this book.

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Appendix

A Social History of Manappuram⁶⁴

Surrounded by rivers from three sides , sandwiched between two estuaries, and hemmed by the sea on its west, lies this sea of sand called Manappuram! The little islets of sand, and the numerous isolated marshes must have made the stage for a flourishing growth of vegetation, including the shrubs and the fruit-bearing trees. And the streams, rivulets and ponds for that of the fish, frogs, snakes, cranes, water-birds, kingfishers and crocodiles. With the hillocks and the small forests for the foxes, rabbits, ant-eaters, monitor lizards, mongoos, and squirrels. Such a beautiful picture it must have been! And the paddy fields that blossomed through this landscape, with its rippling greenery that swayed to the wind! How glorious must have been a labour that built generations swaying to this motion of the top of the green paddy fields!

The strips of land that linked the manappuram with the opposite shore on its eastern side is even today treasured in memory. These strips that made paths for migrations into Manappuram in ancient times bear their marks as the boundaries of ancient villages through the Ayyappa temples, Ayyappan Kaavukal (a grove where lord Ayyappa, an especially cultic deity of the Malayalis is worshipped). They must have been established before Kerala moved under some system of administration.

⁶⁴ This piece of writing was a letter to the researcher by Ravi. Its preface, though personal does not fail to add to the narrative that follows 5.2.2000. Saturday.

Cybil- has already left for Delhi.

Nawaz – is in Trichur; in his College hostel.

Sathish – is perpetuating himself in music and politics, somewhere.

I- am being drawn into a kind of vacuum in life? Is my ill- health fore – boding a prognosis, that is waiting round the corner? Anyhow, given that eternity is as meaningless as nothingness (vacuity) itself; in the course of time even that has its material existence. Then, in the reflections of my mind, there is nothing wrong in searching for its roots! The social history of *manappuram* shrouded though, in its unique strangeness, must be completed.

In a Kerala, retrieved by the axe of Parasurama and the sacred thread, the only proof for the existence of adivasis who bore the colour of the night, is that their genetically diversified species have not been exterminated and have continued to live. The Kerala of the present that has grown through miscegenation, was opened to radical transformation with the migration of the Aryan races. Manappuram must have also transformed into a land suitable for human habitation, in these very times.

The Chera-Chola-Pandya-Perumals must have also thought of Manappuram as one of their main camps. Along with the rise of the port Muziris as an important centre of trade and commerce, the settlements of Thrikkanamathilakom and the feudal settlements of Utholi and Kadalayl also developed. Any signs of human habitation prior to that, have come through menhirs that were found at many places while digging. Yet, more signs of a settlement that was exposed to pottery have not been found.

Some of the land surrounding the old port of Manappuram, Muziris, must have emerged from the sea. The land called Azhikkode and its neighbouring areas must have formed in such a manner. The natural disasters that led to the abandonment of the port and the settlements sprawling around it, must have affected its population badly. The current population of Manappuram is one that has emerged from such an interphase in history and must have settled here over at least a thousand and five hundred years following the beginning of the Christian Era.

Manappuram was also host to the 72 families that came in the year AD345, under the leadership of Thomas of Cana. Sections of Cananite- Catholic of the Syrian Christian; Sunni — Shia of the Muslim, Namutbiri-Nair- Ezhava-Konkani-Chettiyar and the sections of the Hindu lower castes comprise the

Manappuram population largely today. Thus, Manappuram forever encouraged its population as a diverse chain of different religions and castes. Still, compared to the rest of Kerala, the number of Brahmin families is far less in Manappuram. There are proofs to show that during the raids of Tipu, a majority of the illams were abandoned for fear. At the same time, it can be claimed for certain that the manappuram as it stands today was devised by the people who were involved in producing goods related to trade, by tappers of toddy and jaggery, by weavers of mats, baskets and coir and by those engaged in fishing.

Even though feudalism held sway over the relations of ownership of land, as much as in the various aspects of its culture, life was never affected by any serious strife of the landlord-tenant relations. Even the later and more recent generations of the natives of this land —the harijans- were tamed to the generosity of the landowning-trading communities/castes coupled with the fatalism of religions. The class-relations of its society, therefore, grew in an ambience unique to and different from the rest.

The two forts that stand at the north and south of manappuram built by the Dutch and the French respectively inspired visions of voyages abroad, and visions of a prosperity that can be thus attained set firm roots in the psyche of Manappuram as if they were genetically etched. Desire to travel and the possibility of profits from trade that fastened on to the minds that were used to practices such as untouchability and pollution, instilled a fear of redemption from sins. In their expectation of a bright future, such fear laid the path for a tolerance that in its turn gave way for new conventions in place of the old.

Thus the cultural backdrop of migration and trade; prepared the psyche of Manappuram for the growth of a middle class characteristics, early enough.

A daring to migrate to anywhere in search of a livelihood, and once that question was settled, the physical urge to establish one's prowess was winning the gradual acclaim of tradition.

Land names, house names, names of fields, ponds, leased lands and compounds for cultivation; the folk songs, the kalampatru sung with ornamentation, celebrating the family deities, the nanthunipatru etc., and similar ritual performances of these genre all subtly attest to this fact.

Therefore, in the social history of Manappuram, more than a class awareness and diversification, it was always a fight for the upper hand in society that held sway. The force of physical power could beat its way even through the twists and tangles of caste and religion. Yet another unique aspect of Manappuram is that the force of physical power accepted the conventions of upper class hegemony. Why, because the last century that saw tumultuous changes in the history of the world, that also left its imprints in Manappuram with the spread of the ideas of Communism, did not differentiate itself from the same desire for hegemony, that had taken roots years before. It has to be particularly noted that, the martyrdom of Sardar Gopalakrishnan happened at a time when the opportunistic proponents of this hegemony lurked beneath the working class ideology inside the Party.

Even half a century hence, it has continued to haunt the Manappuram as a curse, even to this day. Can the top-rung leadership with their stylized language smacking of the Nambuthiri hegemony, approaching ordinary people be seen in any light other than that of this quest for hegemony?

In such circumstances, if reflections of people like me and any search for the roots of their origin, though they be very deep, turn out to be meaningless, whom do you complain to?

It is understood that before the Sahib(*caaippu* in Malayalam, Connolly, the land strip that linked Edathiruihy with Kattur also formed the trail connecting the two embankments *kara*.

Thus, amongst the many groups that migrated through this strip, into the Manappuram the two groups that settled in Edathiruthy, Kollarayail and Kumbalaparambil must have come from the same place. Although local wisdom orally transmitted over generations, tell the two families were friendly, there are two very thought provoking differences. When the Kollarayil family proliferated in its number of ancestral deities and places of their worship, the kumbalaparambil had little of any such installations for worshipping ancestral deities, till at least fifty years ago. In olden days, the two families never intermarried. It has to be studied why the two clans never intermarried between them, when one of them followed almost a kind of atheism and the other most ardently followed the worship of *devan* and *devi*)

An agricultural practice augmented by the possibilities of profit from trade and a mental Stale numbed by the alienation of migrations, that gave rise to different forms of selfishness in life, the same structures that built the genealogy of the settlers of Manappuram continue to expand even today with extreme indifference. Such minds who owe no commitment to the other, even when as a group forgets and indulges itself, still selfishly seeks to retain the upper hand for one's own selfish benefits. Even while preaching broad-mindedness, the ability to rationalize the diffidence to inspire with one's own mind has become astonishing. This is growing fast amongst the communities of manappuram. This is spreading not merely through the globalization efforts of the neo-Imperialism or computer feudalism, but also through the tastes of separate individuals in every day family life.

A month after the martyrdom of Sardar, in Edappilly in a Communist hunt by the police at least half a dozen people were killed and a lot many 'disappeared' according to the police versions. The decision of the revolutionary parties to not even sustain the memory of them; and resolve of the same parties to commemorate Sardar's martyrdom in Manappuram will make any neutral sane mind think. But, when the psyche of Manappuram there is little to be surprised about that. Because here what has always counted is to ascertain one's own position and ranking in society. Thus, one can see many a character who had no acquaintance with Sardar, pretending to be his comrade his relative and thus covering her/himself with vanity.

Here we must observe words of a respected Communist leader of Kerala who tried to boast about the doings of Sardar, that, he (Sardar) deservedly manhandled Inspector Govindan Nambiar.

This leader was not concerned about, the heightened self-dedication in leading the people, a mark of non-erasable humanity, with which Sardar fought against the riotous run of the police in this land. Then, what is surprising about martyrs losing relevance and being disclaimed over the course of time?

Here in this *manappuram* there is not much history to be spoken of any encouragement, help or co-operation to gifted and special minds to evolve their talents in better arts of appreciating truth. This land has produced many such people. Who have made their own imprints in the fields of art and literature over periods of time. But, all of that, they have claimed from their own independent effort. There are many such talents who never had the ability or the circumstances and gradually vanished into the shifts of time.

Myself can remember many names beginning with the singer Aattakkoya, script wrights, actors, dancers, literatures. etc!

Then the memories of a comrade who sacrificed his life for this land, should not meet with the fate of the comrades who were forgotten in Edappilly. But, in the growing circumstances, cannot one see the proliferation of a culture of selfishness? It has to be examined properly.

Anyhow, I end these thoughts here; keeping my ears sharpened for hearing about more experiences.



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